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ALL THE TRUMPETS SOUNDED

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FATHER ABRAHAM
TURN BACK THE RIVER

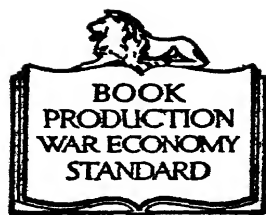
W. G. HARDY

ALL THE TRUMPETS SOUNDED

A Novel Based on the Life of Moses



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
BOOK I. PRINCE OF EGYPT (1265-1240 B.C.) . . .	7
BOOK II. GOD OF SINAI (1240-1223 B.C.) . . .	181
BOOK III. THE DELIVERER (1220 B.C.) . . .	273

“When the day that he must go hence was come, many accompanied him to the riverside, into which as he went he said, ‘Death, where is thy sting?’ And as he went down deeper, he said, ‘Grave where is thy victory?’ So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.”

—John Bunyan: *Pilgrim's Progress*

BOOK I
PRINCE OF EGYPT
(1265-1240 B.C.)

RAMESES THE GREAT IS PHARAOH

CHAPTER I

HEAT hung over Egypt. The narrow gorge of the Southland was a trough, packed full with heat. In the flat triangle of the Northland, the level fields lay baked and parched, gasping for the inundation which did not come. The broad Nile flowed along feebly, glassily, as if stupefied, and the teeming cities along its banks—Syene and Thebes and Abydos and Nekhen and On and Sais and Buto and Tanis and Memphis, where Northland and Southland meet—were sprawled helplessly beneath the sun, waiting for the hot noon to pass.

It was a heat, indeed, such as the oldest inhabitants of Memphis could not remember. It sweltered in the spacious homes of the wealthy. It rested like a pall on the close-packed, mud-brick hovels of the poor. The courts and the gleaming colonnades of the great temple of Ptah were empty. In the narrow, twisted streets down by the wharves, ordinarily thronged with stinking, unwashed humanity, scarcely a dog moved. Out on the wide stream the ships rested motionless, their very masts seeming to droop; and, below Memphis, the avenues of palms along the river and the graceful villas and stately palaces were as still and silent as the city itself.

But the noontide quiet of mighty Memphis was an uneasy quiet. You could not say why. You could not put your finger on this or that. But the stillness seemed to vibrate. The very heat seemed to quiver with a premonition of impending events, with a threat of catastrophe to come. Without knowing the reason why, people were restless. They moved about. Just outside Memphis, in a court of his pleasant villa, Intef, the Vizier of the Northland, paced to and fro. His mind was distraught. His ears were intent. Within that villa his wife, the dainty-breasted Amenirtis, was burning up with fever, while Nun, the debonair and skilled physician of the Hebrews, battled for her life. Whenever he paused Intef could hear the monotonous murmurings

of his wife's delirium and the soothing tones of Nun's voice as he tried to quiet her. If Nun could only save her! If the inundation would only come and shatter this terrible, this uncanny heat. Intef groaned and vowed a sacrifice, a great sacrifice of a hundred oxen, if the inundation should come.

Yet even in the midst of his anxiety, part of Intef's mind kept recurring to the Pharaoh and his cryptic remarks of the night before. What had the Pharaoh meant? What measures did Rameses the Great intend to take against the Hebrews?

A half-mile farther down the river, midway between Intef's villa and the palace of Rameses, the Princess Bint-Anath lay, face-down and nude, in a room which had been shuttered against the heat. But the heat seeped in. The Princess cursed and tossed her shapely body this way and that. Her irritated mind, in the curious way of minds, fastened on her husband, Prince Dedi, the governor of Kush. That beer jar of a man! A man who couldn't get a child, even on a slave girl. And she had been so sure this time. She had told Nefri, and Nefri had told all the ladies of the court. How they would laugh at her behind their fans! How they would parade their brats before her!

The Princess rolled over on her back. By Set and by Amon, she was tired of it. Four years married and no child. If you didn't have a child you were pointed at. Besides she wanted a child desperately. She felt, somehow, that her entity was not complete without a child. Yet—no child—not a sign of one. What could be wrong with her? The peasants had their children—swarms of them. So did the Hebrews. Look at Jochebed, the wife of that pale-faced jeweller, two youngsters already and a third almost here. Why should she, the favourite daughter of the Pharaoh, who could have anything else she desired, be denied the one thing she wanted, more than jewels, more than honours, more, almost, than power? Was she accursed?

Bint-Anath sat up abruptly. A pilgrimage? She'd tried that. Other men? Unfortunately, there had already been other men. No, she was accursed—or else Prince Dedi, that fat jelly bowl, was accursed. She'd get rid of him, anyway. Yes, now that her hopes had been proved false, she'd get rid of that—that imitation of a man. Though, what good that would do her . . .

The Princess let her shapely body slump together. She glanced about her. The statue of Mother Isis, holding the infant Horus at her breast, caught her attention. For an instant in the half-gloom the blank eyes of the goddess seemed filled with an other-worldly and inhuman wisdom.

"A child, Mother Isis," prayed Bint-Anath, holding out her arms. "Give me a child."

The expression in the eyes of Isis did not alter. The Princess dropped her arms. The thought of the Hebrew women recurred to her. Everyone said how fertile they were. Perhaps their gods were more potent than the gods of Egypt. Perhaps, if she were to go to Jochebed . . .

It was this last thought which made her recall abruptly that her father's blow against the Hebrews was soon to fall. How far would he go? she wondered. Just what did he have in mind?

No one could have told her except the Pharaoh himself, at this moment sitting calm and imperturbable in a room of his great palace and giving his final orders to the captain of his Sherden and to the chief men amongst his paid agitators.

"That is understood then?" he said, looking from one to the other from under half-closed eyelids. "The way has been well prepared. You understand clearly what you are to do?"

"Yes, Divinity," they answered in unison.

"See that you do not fail," the Pharaoh commanded, and leaned back, his proud, arrogant face as aloof as if he were a statue in polished granite.

One began to understand the sense of unease which brooded over Memphis, to comprehend whence it was derived. Back in the city, Joram, the Hebrew whose ships went out to Canaan and Syria and Phoenicia and Cyprus, stood in his garden by the river and stared unseeingly at the broad, glassy stream, the beaded sweat trickling down unheeded over his sunken cheeks and hooked nose. A boat, he was thinking. The palace is guarded on the landward side. But a boat, a boat coming in by way of the river. . . .

A shudder shook his spare frame. He wrenched his eyes from the river and from the boat tied up at the wharf along the foot of the garden. He glanced at the sun, blazing between the fronds of the scrawny, bedraggled palm under which he stood. The Pharaoh considered it an honour. Any Egyptian would so consider it. But he could not. His Leah, his timid gazelle, whom he had watched run laughing as a child through this same garden, torn from him by the soldiers to become the Pharaoh's concubine. By the tomb of Joseph, he thought savagely, turning from the river, he was less than a man, less than a father, if he did not take action. And yet, who could strike the Pharaoh? The Pharaoh was more than man. The Pharaoh was himself a god. What could a man do? What? He found no answer.

In the great temple of Ptah, Khamwese, the favourite son of the Pharaoh and the most skilled of the famed magicians of Egypt, had come into the secret shrine of the god. His pale face was strained and sickly as he swung his censer and bowed low before the jewel-bedecked statue, intoning his prayers, begging

mighty Ptah to bring on the long-delayed inundation, the inundation which was food and breath and life itself to holy Kham.

The god stared back at him unwinkingly. A half-dozen streets away, panting heavily in the shade of an acacia, while a slave moved a fan above him, stirring the hot, dead air to no purpose, Eye, the seller of gold-mounted whips from Canaan and damascened bronzes of Phoenicia and green gold of Emu and inlaid vases of diorite and alabaster, fashioned cunningly by the workmen of Memphis, wheezed angrily to his wife:

"It's the Hebrews, Ptah curse them. Ra's hand is heavy on us because of the Hebrews. No wonder the inundation does not come. No wonder we can scarce draw a breath. By the Bull of Apis, these Hebrews grow too sly."

Down near the Asiatic quarter, curled up in the shadow of a wall, Herhor, the water carrier, was thinking the same thing in different terms. So were a thousand, no, ten thousand others like him. One approached, at last, the heart of the unease in Memphis, and, indeed, in all the cities of Egypt. It began to coil into an ugly, evil form. The Hebrews! Those aliens from Goshen, those strangers who had spread over the land, worming themselves in where they were not wanted, bringing with them their fatal cleverness and their equally fatal adaptability and their thrice-damned aura of superiority. A man can forgive all else except this last. This last is the insult which can only be wiped out with blood. The Hebrews! Let them be cursed. This was the breath that quivered in the noontide heat of Memphis, this was the uneasy sense of impending events. The Hebrews!

The Hebrews themselves could not fail to be conscious of the danger in the air. Even in the noontide heat they stirred anxiously. They whispered to each other. They had a sense of tension, of waiting for what they did not quite know. Like any other people who have lived in security for generations, they could not, however, believe entirely in a real peril. A new tax, perhaps. A riot or two. But, once the inundation came and the heat broke, the danger would pass, as it had passed before. Pray Joseph-el, and Jacob-el that it would pass! Take gifts this evening to Apis, the Sacred Bull, and to Baal and Astarte, the gods of the Syrians. Yes, it would pass. Surely it would pass.

But Jochebed, the wife of Amram the jeweller, who dwelt in the Street of the Goldsmiths outside the Hebrew quarter of Memphis, was by no means certain that the danger would dissolve. She sat at this moment on a bench in the room which opened on the inner court and looked across at her husband. Amram seemed oblivious of the heat, oblivious, too, of Aaron and Miriam and herself. Jochebed sighed. She shifted her weight

carefully, conscious that she was very near her time and tried to forget her anxieties. But her fears nagged at her. She said:

"All this talk, Amram. Do you think it will come to anything?"

Amram did not seem to hear. He was staring out at the fig tree in the courtyard where the linnet rested in its cage, its wings held out a little from its body, its beak partly open, its eyes filmed. Jochebed knew that her husband did not see the linnet. She repeated her question. Amram came out of his reverie.

"What was it you said, wife?"

She asked her question, once more, patiently. One had to be patient with Amram. To Amram the present was never important. Amram lived with the gigantic figures of the past, with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, only to him these men were not, as they were to the rest of the Hebrews, half-forgotten designs on some legendary tapestry, but real and living persons, actual leaders to whom God Almighty Himself had revealed His purposes and His promises for His people. He said now:

"Who knows? For who can see into the mind of Yahweh?"

Ordinarily Jochebed would have said nothing more, would have allowed her husband to relapse into his world of abstruse speculations and saintly dreaming. Today, however, she was insistent:

"The people spit at us in the streets. The children throw sticks and lumps of mud and offal at Aaron and Miriam. They cry at us that the Pharaoh will soon drive us out of Memphis, that he will herd us back to Goshen to join our kinsfolk there. What think you of it, Amram?"

Amram's pale hands moved restlessly. "Nothing happens without the will of Yahweh, Jochebed. We must have faith in Yahweh."

"But if that should happen, what will become of our children, of Aaron and Miriam and of this one I carry within me? Is there not something to be done? You are an elder of the Hebrews, Amram. Why do you not do something? And why did you and Koher and Jabal refuse to sacrifice to the Divinity of the Pharaoh? That was but a little thing."

"Little!" Amram was abruptly transformed. "Little!" His eyes, the eyes of an idealist, blazed at her. "To sacrifice to a *man*! To grant to a man what is the attribute of God Almighty alone! Be not blasphemous, Jochebed."

His wife sighed. She patted Aaron's curly head. She pushed a stray lock of hair out of Miriam's eyes. There were moments, indeed, when she wished that Amram were not quite so saintly. It was true that no Hebrew in Memphis was more learned than

he. It was true that he alone could tell you in sequence the legends of Abraham's wanderings and how Joseph had come to Egypt and why from amongst the Hebrews when the rest had removed to Egypt, Judah and Israel had remained behind so that, though four centuries now separated them, the Hebrews in Egypt still had kindred in Canaan. No other man could explain that to you. Nor was there anyone in Memphis as skilled in doctrine or religious observances or philosophical discussion. Yahweh—always Yahweh. Yahweh was an obsession with Amram. The other Hebrews in Memphis had almost forgotten Yahweh. They worshipped Joseph-el and Jacob-el and Baal of the Syrians and Apis, the Sacred Bull, and a dozen other gods. But Amram did not worship them. Amram was a fanatic in his worship of Yahweh.

Yet Yahweh, if Amram was right about him, was a god of the desert, or, at best, a god of Canaan. Was it reasonable to suppose that such a god could have power in Egypt, so far from his native dwelling place? Was it not better to worship the gods who dwelt in Egypt and had power in the land? It seemed so to Jochebed. She glanced at her husband, thinking of pointing this out, thinking of asking whether Yahweh could protect them from the Egyptians. That, surely, was the test of a god. But when she saw him sitting with his hands between his knees, his pale face rapt, his lips moving soundlessly, travelling once more in some far land into which she could not follow him, she abandoned the idea. No use to ask Amram. When it came to anything practical she would have to decide for herself. It had always been so, ever since Kohath, her half-brother, had come to her with his proposal that she marry his son. The designs, for instance, which Amram made at his goldsmith's bench had a rare quality about them as if—so the Princess Bint-Anath had once said to her—they reached through the sight into the very heart of beauty. But it was herself, not Yahweh, who had seen the possibilities of this, so that her husband had become the favoured jeweller of the court. Yes, someone had to be practical.

"I'm thirsty, Mother," Aaran said petulantly.

Jochebed got up draggingly. She picked up a bowl, walked over to the gourd which was slung against the wall in the shade, tilted out water, and brought it back to her son. He drank.

"I'm so hot," he whimpered.

"Midday will soon be over," Jochebed told him. She sat down, her strong face grave and quiet, and took Aaron's damp head into her lap. "If the danger does become real," she told herself,

"I'll have to think of something. Amram will be as helpless as a child. Yes, I'll have to think of something."

The long noon passed. The heat did not really lessen. But, as the afternoon lengthened, the sun was not quite so fiery. People began to rouse themselves. They stood at the doors of their houses. They strolled out into the streets. They looked about them.

Yet they did not betake themselves to their ordinary occupations. The sense of unease was too strong upon them. They gathered in knots. They wiped off from their foreheads the sweat which should have been there and wasn't. They talked with furred tongues to each other, speculating on the rumours which in these days, coming from no one knew whence, were continually running through the city. Were there really thousands of the Pharaoh's soldiers encamped outside the city? Was the talk of the last few weeks actuality? Was it true that the Pharaoh was really ready to kick those dogs of aliens out of Memphis? No, it couldn't be. The Hebrews had lived in Egypt for centuries. They had spread out from Goshen all over Egypt. They had married Egyptians. They marched in the armies of Egypt. They had become prosperous, too prosperous, Set damn them. A people who stuck together like burrs. New ones, with the smell of sheep and cattle on them, always drifting into the city. But the Pharaoh might confiscate their property. Or put a heavier tax on them. That would be something. But was it true, as the priests said, that the inundation didn't come because two weeks ago the elders of the Hebrews, Amram and Koher and Balak and Jabal and the rest, had refused to sacrifice to the Divinity of the Pharaoh? If that were true, nothing was too bad for the Hebrews. Without the inundation there would be no food, no life, no anything. The inundation was Egypt. Let the demons of Set seize the Hebrews and their Joseph-el and Jacob-el and Yahweh and their other alien gods. A people for whom the gods of Egypt were not good enough, who practised strange rites, who, as you could see from their faces, were lustful and cunning and deceitful.

Thus the talk ran, heavy with heat and with a malice which, only small six months before, had grown by leaps and bounds. The mob of Memphis did not realize from whence these ideas and arguments had come. Like any mass of humanity in any day or age it preferred its ideas ready-made and swallowed them like the pills the physicians of Memphis made. For days and weeks and months the paid agitators of the Pharaoh had been purveying these pills, offering them in the market-place,

handing them out disguised with spouting words at the street corners and in the taverns, stuffing them down the throats of the folk of Memphis and honeying them with references to the high and noble history of holy Kham and the culture of the true-blooded Egyptians. By this time, the pills had fermented. By this time, as the Pharaoh well knew, the people of Memphis were ready for action.

It was just before dusk that the word came. The people of Memphis did not know that the same word was flung into Thebes and Sais and On and Abydos and the other cities of Egypt at one and the same time. What they heard was at first a single crier, and then a dozen, then a hundred, dashing through the streets, stopping at each corner to shout out the proclamation of the Pharaoh: "The Hebrews are aliens. The Hebrews refuse to worship the Divinity of the Pharaoh. All their property—all—is confiscated. They themselves are slaves. They shall be herded into Goshen, there to labour for the Pharaoh. His protection is withdrawn from over them. They are defenceless. This night is yours. Do what you like."

This was what they heard; or, at least, how they interpreted what they heard. They looked at each other, hesitant. They turned from each other to stare at the soldiers of the Pharaoh marching into the streets, grinning Nubians and lithe Libyans and stalwart, barbaric Sherden. And then the agitators were running amongst them, brandishing torches as the hot dusk fell, shouting: "On to the Hebrews! Plunder! Rape! Burn! Down with the Hebrews!"

The unease of the day blazed abruptly into action. It was like an eruption. One moment the knots and groups of men were waiting, doubtful, gaping. The next, they were gathered into mobs, shouting, bellowing, hysterical—snatching torches, grabbing up weapons, rushing down the streets towards the Hebrew quarters like converging torrents. In a fragment of time, as it seemed afterward, they burst like a tidal wave upon the Hebrews. The first roof flared up in flames. The first Hebrew shopkeeper, mouth open, in bewilderment, was dragged from his home and beaten and kicked to death in the streets. The first Hebrew woman was seized and stripped and flung down on the floor, or across the bed, or in the dust.

And then the tide engulfed the Hebrews. There was some resistance, not much, but enough to infuriate. By the time the first grinning soldiers arrived there was little they could do, even if they had had the desire. Their orders, indeed, were definite, to throw a cordon around the section so that no Hebrews could escape and to protect the homes of the wealthiest from

pillage in order that the property might be saved for the Pharaoh. This they did, and no more. For the rest they let the tide pour on and grinned.

It was on this night that Jabal, the ship chandler, roaring like the bull-necked fellow he was, killed a half-dozen Egyptians at the door of his house before a thrown knife sliced his throat. On this night, too, Joram, the merchant, slipping out the back door of his house as the mob rushed in at the front, flung himself into the boat at the foot of his garden and pushed out into the river. When he was there, he looked back at the city. He listened to the shouting of men and the screams of women. A snarl curled his lips. Turning the prow of his boat he began to slip downstream and this time his purpose was no longer wavering but was fixed and threatening.

It was on this night also that Nun, the physician, returned late from the villa of Intef. For long hours he had thought of nothing but his battle with death. Now that the victory was won, he was relaxed in his carrying-chair, his mind blank, his thoughts at peace. But, as he entered Memphis, he sat up suddenly, and, realizing fire and turmoil in the Hebrew quarter, ordered his bearers to quicken their pace. A street away from his home, the way was blocked. Leaping from the chair he fought a road through to his home. There was a milling mob around the entrance. He broke through it. There in the street was his wife—his delicate, high-bred wife—and a half-dozen Sherden soldiers. Nun, who prided himself on his philosophic detachment and whose calm atheism had often infuriated Amram, felt the world reel about him. Then he went out of his senses. He flung himself at the soldiers, babbling, cursing, clawing with his hands. A Sherden, impatient at the interruption, flung him back. Nun picked himself up and ran at the man, his eyes staring, seeing only the sword at the soldier's side. He grabbed at it, frenzied, his eyes swivelling to his wife, his soft-eyed Ruth, there in the street—naked. The Sherden with a curse tossed him back again and, as he rushed in once more, met him with a slash of his sword. Nun fell, senseless, in the dust.

It was at this moment that to Amram and Jochebed the child, Moses, was born.

CHAPTER II

THERE was no premonition in the Pharaoh's mind that Moses had just uttered his first wail. Nor was there any sign in his face that, at his word, rape and murder and panic had just been un-

leashed upon the Hebrews in Memphis and in all the cities of Egypt. Gazing at him, indeed, one might have been led to reflect that by some strange irony of human events those who are most responsible for terror and inhuman cruelty are themselves completely untouched even in conscience by what they are doing. Sitting in his golden chair, of which the arms were golden birds, their wings, beautifully chased, stretched in the downbeat, he looked with hooded eyes at Intef, the Vizier of the Northland, and at Ebana, the fat and perpetually tremulous Vizier of the Southland.

They waited humbly, anxiously. Raméses smiled within himself. Power, he thought, drawing in a long breath, and transferred his gaze to the inner court in which he sat, the lotus flowers floating in the pool which was open to the sky, the blue and gold pillars round the pool, the coloured awning above his chair, the guards and slaves standing about respectfully, waiting, all of them, on his word. Yes, power. His eyes came back to his viziers. He knew that they were startled and stunned by the terror he had let loose on the Hebrews. He knew that Intef, in particular—since Intef was a cultured, kindly man who was, in addition, bound by friendship to certain of the Hebrews—wanted to protest. But Intef did not dare to say a word. Ah, there would be pleasure in compelling Intef, whose family was one of the oldest in Egypt, older even than the Pharaoh's own, to do his will.

Rameses leaned back. With a graceful movement of his wrist and fingers, he stretched out his hand, took a grape from the alabaster plate which a kneeling slave held up to him, dipped it into the silver bowl of water another slave presented, and put it into his mouth slowly, delicately. Power, he thought again, as his teeth crushed the grape, power. Well, now he would tell them.

He swallowed the grape. He turned to his viziers. In cold precise terms he informed them of his plans. He explained that this night of licence was calculated to crush the spirit of the Hebrews and any thought of resistance that might lurk amongst them. On the morrow his soldiers would begin to herd them together, men and women and children, in preparation for the long march to Goshen, where their fellows dwelt. There they would, all of them—those who now dwelt in Goshen and the newcomers from the city—become bondsmen of the Pharaoh, to raise crops and cattle and flocks and herds for him, to supply by levies of forced labour the human material for the buildings he had planned; whilst all their possessions were to be gathered into the treasury of Egypt and recorded.

"This last will be your immediate task," he pointed out to the viziers. He paused, smiling a little, and Intef and Ebana watched him anxiously since no man could predict this Pharaoh, this Rameses the Great. "Thus," Rameses went on, "I have solved the problem with which you two faced me. You told me the treasury of Egypt was empty. You told me that the peasants murmured at the exactions of the tax gatherers and at the levies of forced labour so that, on both counts, my programme of building could not go forward. Well, I have solved the problem for you. My treasury will be filled. I shall have labour—labour and to spare. Nor will the peasants of Egypt murmur longer. They will bless me."

He sat back and waited.

"Brilliant, O Majesty," Ebana babbled hastily. "Magnificent, O He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken."

Rameses looked at Intef. Intef said nothing. The Pharaoh's lips grew thin. His whole face hardened.

"Well?" he asked harshly, the fingers of his right hand beginning to drum on the arm of his chair.

Intef hesitated. Every instinct within him clamoured to break out in denunciation, to excoriate the Pharaoh for his cold-blooded brutality, his inhuman injustice. But he did not dare. That was the whole point of it. He did not dare. The Pharaoh was absolute. In the Pharaoh's own hands, by law, reposed all the land and all the property of Egypt, save only that belonging to the priests and the temples. And the Pharaoh had soldiers to do his bidding. Nor would the Pharaoh hesitate. Intef thought of his wife and his infant daughter. No, he did not dare. But he did venture to plead for a little humanity, a little mercy.

"I say naught about your decision, O Shepherd-of-Your-People," he began humbly. "But, if it is your firm-fixed will that the Hebrews are to be herded into Goshen and all their possessions taken from them, let this, at least, be done decently and with all the kindness possible. These Hebrews have lived at peace in Egypt for centuries. They have fought in our armies. They are not peasants. They are architects, merchants, physicians, cultured men——"

"They are dogs," Rameses interrupted. "Dogs of aliens. Moreover," he added, his lips twisting into a grim, cruel smile, "they are defenceless. Nor will anyone move to save them. No one troubles about the stick which beats another man's back."

"But their women, O Ruler-of-the-Two-Lands. They are delicately reared. You know what a mob is like. And you know

what your soldiers will do—both now and during the march to Goshen—unless they are restrained. To leave delicately bred women at the mercy of the Sherden and the Nubians——”

“That is not your concern,” the Pharaoh broke in, his eyes flashing. “You step outside your province, Intef.”

“Yes, Majesty——”

“Will you dare argue? Heads, Intef, have been known to divorce themselves from their shoulders before now.”

He waited. Intef was silent. The Pharaoh permitted himself the slightest trace of a disdainful smile. He leaned back in his chair.

“Keep to your own task,” he advised Intef. “It will be heavy enough. Or do you not realize, Intef?”—he leaned forward again—“that Goshen is in the Northland? Have you not comprehended that it will be your task, once the Hebrews are herded into Goshen, to collect from the crops they grow and to drive them out to labour on my buildings and to see that they complete the tally of work I shall demand from them. Nor will I be easy on them, Intef. The dogs shall work, work under the lash, work with the stakes of impalement waiting. And you, Intef—your men shall wield the lash. Your men shall push them down on the stakes of impalement. Now, have you aught to say?”

The Pharaoh waited again, his eyes cold and deadly, his whole frame tense, as he watched the struggle within his vizier’s mind. He saw the fierce protest on Intef’s back-flung face yield to doubt and indecision. He waited. Intef bowed his head. Rameses relaxed. He smiled.

You are not ruthless enough, Intef, he thought within himself. No, those who would have power—and hold it—must be hard, Intef, relentless. But you—you are too civilized, too soft. Civilization has made you weak. It—and its refinements—sympathy, pity, talk and yet more talk—they have eaten the hardness out of you.”

Aloud, he observed contemptuously: “You may withdraw.”

The Pharaoh did not even watch his viziers salaam their way, backward, to the entrance. He took a sip of wine from the goblet of lapis lazuli, inset cunningly with gold and precious stones, which a slave held up to him. He lifted a hand. From the farther entrance a troupe of girls, beautifully shaped under the gauze which was no more than a mist, drifted like floating leaves into the space between himself and the pool. From somewhere beyond them the notes of a harp, pure and delicate, stole through the court like disembodied pearls.

The Pharaoh’s face changed. He placed an elbow on the arm of his chair and leaned his face against his hand. His eyes,

which could blaze with maniacal anger or harden into merciless savagery, were half-adream. The lips, so fitted for arrogance and egotism, softened into sensuousness, as he watched the dancers, weaving the old, the patterned dances of Egypt. Grace—beauty—yes, life did have its refinements—as well as its brutalities—each in its proper place—each deeply satisfying. It was satisfying to compel a man such as Intef to do what he detested doing. But this—the beauty of the dancers, the luxury around him, the notes of the harp—this was good, too. Rameses the Great, in fact, felt very much at peace with himself. At forty-six he was handsome and vigorous. And at forty-six, in the twenty-seventh year of his reign, the power of Egypt once more stretched from the Fourth Cataract northward through the Two Lands and across Canaan to Syria and Naharin. Once more the ships of Egypt whitened the Inland Sea and the Narrow Sea. Once again the slow caravans crawled their way to the shining cities, strung like jewels along the Nile. Never had the Two Lands been more wealthy and more powerful. And he, Rameses the Great, had accomplished this.

The Pharaoh picked out another grape, daintily. He put it into his mouth, watching the dancers and letting the music invade his spirit. And as he watched, relaxed, the proud progress of his life marched through his mind, feeding his egotism, adding to his feeling of content. At nineteen he had ousted his elder brother from the throne. In the fourth year of his reign he had led the armies of Egypt up through Canaan to meet the hosts of Kheta. There at Kadesh—ah, he could see the scene again, the hot sun brightening the walls of the city and the river, the consternation of his bodyguard to find themselves cut off from the rest of the army—he had, single-handed, so the poets sang and so the sculptors depicted it and so Rameses had come to believe, charged the hosts of the Kheta and overthrown them.

The Pharaoh's memory lingered a little on that day, tasting again the glory and the confidence of it. Then, his mind moved on. He recalled how, seven years before this, he had had inscribed on a silver tablet a treaty of peace with Hattusil, King of the Kheta. Well, he had been weary of warfare. He had wanted to enjoy what he had won. Besides, Egypt's power was secure.

This was what he had thought then. But now—the Pharaoh frowned—now—mere luxury sated a man. Power? Power grew stale unless you used it. And life was so short. And there had been so many—such mighty Pharaohs before him—

The dancers had finished. Three acrobats, a girl and two men, leaped into the open space before the Pharaoh's throne. Rameses

scarcely saw them. He did not realize it; but there was in him a vaulting vanity and an overriding egotism which demanded that he outmatch all the long line of the Pharaohs between himself and that Menes who had first united the Two Lands. It did not satisfy Rameses that he had equalled the first Seti and the third Thutmose in his military exploits. Nor was it sufficient that already in his hareem scores of sons and daughters bore witness to his god-given virility or that Egypt under his sway had reached the zenith of magnificence and luxury. No, Rameses was determined to imprint himself so deeply on Egypt that no other Pharaoh, past or to come, would be even spoken of in comparison with himself. Others had built the ancient pyramids. Still others had reared temples and obelisks and cities. Now that his campaigning was done the Pharaoh had resolved that his buildings, too, should surpass those of all his predecessors. Yes, his lineaments should gaze across the centuries in stone and all who beheld them should lower their voices and whisper, "Behold, Rameses the Great!" And now that he had the Hebrews in his power—the Pharaoh's hand clenched on the arm of his gold and ivory chair—now that he had the Hebrews he would quicken the tempo of his building. Obelisks, palaces, cities, temples, fortresses; they should spring up as if by a careless wave of his arm.

The Pharaoh could not have told you exactly why a hatred for the Hebrews had become so ingrained in him. It was, in part, because the Hebrews had come into Egypt with the Hyksos, those Asiatic barbarians who had for a time ruled over Egypt, and even though three centuries had passed since then, the thought of that arrogant conquest by foreigners was as an insult to Rameses, the Egyptian. But it was the refusal of the Hebrews to worship his divinity which had put teeth into the Pharaoh's nascent dislike so that when an empty treasury and the complaints of the peasants had made some action necessary if his building programme was not to be abandoned, Rameses had fastened baleful eyes upon these aliens. But his hatred came from something more—and this something was in the Pharaoh's mind at the moment. A Hebrew to refuse his daughter as a concubine for the Pharaoh, he was thinking fiercely. And then, the girl herself. Any other woman in Egypt—or beyond Egypt—would have been breathless at the honour done her. But not this girl. He had had to use force. Well, he remembered with a certain savage pleasure, the girl had been taught her lesson. Now the Hebrews would be taught theirs. Defy him, would they? Refuse to worship him? Their backs should suffer for it. Their women would take—not a Pharaoh—but brutal Sherden and

grinning Nubians. Yes, the Hebrews should be ground between the nether and the upper millstones. Yes, the Hebrews—men and women—would come to know the might of the Pharaoh.

The acrobats, too, had finished. The music changed. The notes of the harp ceased. In a corner of the court a girl began to play on the double lute, a melancholy minor strain. In the shadows beyond the pool a voice took up the song, a song which sang of love but through which there throbbed that note of eternal sadness which waits behind the veil of joy. The Pharaoh's reverie was penetrated. He looked up. Rising from his chair he walked down to the lily pool. Through the opening in the roof the moon was flooding down. Rameses thought briefly of the blonde virgin of the Mitanni who had been brought before him that morning. She would be waiting, prepared for him by the women of his harem.

But it was hot. And the music made him feel reflective and a little sad. Turning from the pool he strolled across the court and into a room which opened on it. The floor was gold mosaic. Brilliant frescoes lined its walls. On a shaft of green-veined jasper rested a portrait bust of his favourite daughter, the Princess Bint-Anath. The Pharaoh looked at it, appreciating the manner in which the artist had caught in purity the proud planes and outlines of her face. The fugitive wonder passed through his mind as to why this daughter, whose face was already sculptured beside his own on many of his monuments, alone of all his women seemed able to get almost anything she wished of him. But he did not pursue the thought. At the opposite side of the room the shutters of the floor-deep window had been pulled up to admit the night air.

The Pharaoh walked over and stepped out into the garden. He stood still for a moment. Above him the tall palms towered motionless. Around him were the mingled scents and fragrances of aromatic bushes and of flowers, of honeysuckle and arbutus and cassia and spikenard and trumpet vine and oleander and of lilies and chrysanthemums and of scores of others. You could not see their colours. But the trickling water, running in the irrigation channels, preserved their freshness against the heat. Led by some undefined impulse the Pharaoh strolled through them to the river's bank. Before him the great stream was a broad, slumbrous sheet of silver. Far out a pleasure boat drifted. Closer at hand but out of sight, the dip and splash of paddles came to him and a snatch of song as the fishermen set their nets. Up the river, Memphis, the mighty city, the courtesan of the world, the city to which Libyans and Syrians and Nubians and Phoenicians, and all the Peoples of the North, came, as men

come to the sound of music and of dancing and of laughter, was sprawled black under the moon.

It did not occur to the Pharaoh that through that black bulk strode the panic and the cruelty which he had unloosed. His eyes took it in at this moment as part of the mysterious and other-worldly beauty which the moon had created for him. It was so beautiful.

"Egypt, my Egypt," he murmured and with eyes that were other than the physical he seemed to see the Two Lands which were his, the narrow sinuous gorge of the Southland above Memphis winding for league on league between its yellow, flat-topped hills and the level reaches of the Northland below him where the river divided into seven possessive fingers as it stretched forward to the Inland Sea. "All mine!" he thought magnificently, and reached his arms above his head, smiling proudly in the moonlight, a sense of power flooding into him. "Mine to do with as I will. Aye, Amon has been good to me. And I will raise temples to Amon."

He lowered his arms. He did not hear a splash in the water near the bank on which he stood; or, if he did, he attributed it to the fishermen and their boats. Instead he noted again the secret, mysterious beauty of the river. Egypt, he thought, was the river and the river was Egypt. Soon the inundation would come. Soon all Egypt would bloom again like the rose and be fruitful like the palm. There was the sound of music drifting faintly across the water from the pleasure boat. In the Pharaoh's present mood with the silver of the river before him and the distant hills softened to beckoning, mysterious shadows, the music made him think of love, of the soft arms of women, of their broken, inarticulate cries. The girl of the Mitanni came into his mind again. This time desire accompanied the thought. Rameses turned back to the palace. The light from the room he had left came out palely into the garden, its spears blunted by the trees and the bushes. Before the Pharaoh's eyes was the blonde beauty of that girl, the skin so white amongst the dark Egyptians, the delicate insink of the waist, the coral tips of the firm uptilted breasts, and, above all, the eyes, the timid shyness of the eyes. By the phallus of Min——

Rameses took a quick, impulsive step forward. It was one which saved his life. For it was at this instant that from the bush beside the path a figure leaped and struck. The blow of the axe clove the space where the Pharaoh had been. An ordinary man might have paused a second to turn and look. But not Rameses. There was in him as had, indeed, been proved at Kadesh, that split-instant recognition of danger which, in the

same fraction of time, knows what to do and the muscles obey. He darted for the lighted room, drawing his dagger and shouting powerfully as he ran. The figure with the axe crashed after him. The Pharaoh's quick glance swept the room as he leaped into it. A dagger would be feeble against the axe. As his assailant charged after him and hesitated, dazzled by the strangeness of the room, the portrait bust of the Princess Bint-Anath smote against him, staggering him. The Pharaoh leaped upon him. When his guards, summoned by his shouts, at last burst into the room, the Pharaoh was drawing his dagger carefully through a fold of Joram's tunic, wiping off the blood and recognizing the man at the same time.

"Master," the captain of the palace guards stammered. "Divinity."

"He has too easy a death," the Pharaoh observed slowly, watching Joram gasp out his life.

"If we had known, master——"

"But your fellows shall suffer for it," Rameses shouted suddenly at the dying man. He bent down to him. "Take that with you to the dark dungeons of Set. The Hebrews shall suffer. Man, woman, and child. By Set, the children of the Hebrews shall die on the spear points. By Set and by Amon, every male child that is born shall be cast to the crocodiles of holy Nile. Do you hear, you dog?"

But Joram was by now in that land where what happens to the living is no longer of concern.

CHAPTER III

THE first spears of dawn were thrusting into the sky above Memphis. With their appearance the fury of the rapine and the plunder ebbed. There are certain things to which light is an enemy. One by one the mob began to slink away. The movement quickened until it was like a wave in retreat. By the time a rosy spiral of molten colour was quivering above the eastern hills the streets of the Hebrew quarter were deserted save for the tumbled wreckage, left where it had fallen. In the street in front of his home Nun lay where the sword-cut had felled him. Jabal's powerful body, contorted in death, had been tossed to the side of the door he had defended and in the room beyond were the naked and dead bodies of his wife and daughters. Over in the Street of the Potters, Huldah, the daughter of Shimei, forgetful that there was only a torn rag or so around her, knelt

in the dust and gathered her father's white head in her lap and tried to wipe away the blood which clotted his beard. Down the deserted Street of the Bull, Bilhah, the wife of Benaiah, wandered aimlessly, her eyes blank, holding her dead baby in her arms and soothing it mechanically as she walked. In the house of Koher a group of Hebrews were on their knees around the shrine of Joseph-el, stretching out their hands to him, calling on him and Jacob-el and Apis, the Sacred Bull of Memphis, to save them from the fury of the Egyptians. In another home close by, Balak, the weaver, was foaming at the mouth, his eyes red and angry as he cursed the statue of Baal and beat it with a stick because Baal had failed him.

They had, none of them living or dead, any foreknowledge of the long road of misery and suffering which the feet of the Hebrews had still to tread; and the living amongst them, at least, could only stumble on blindly, kept moving by the foolish spark of hope that at some time persecution will cease, which is implanted in their race. Amram alone was not disturbed. With a faith which, had he been conscious, would have seemed to Nun utterly ridiculous, Amram was on his knees, bowing before the will of Yahweh and trusting in His wisdom and His purpose.

"By suffering doth He school His people," was his feeling. "By the whip of punishment doth He turn them to the road He would have them take." And in his mind were the promises made to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob. Canaan, he thought in exaltation. To Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey, shall I bring you, and the land shall be yours and your seed's seed after you. Thus spake to Abraham the Lord God Almighty.

In the inner room Jochebed lay on her narrow couch. The agony of labour was over. But she could not rest. The terrible events of the night, which had, indeed, hastened the birth of Moses, precluded rest. She and her family had been spared so far by the accident of dwelling outside the Hebrew quarter in the Street of the Goldsmiths. But for how long? This was the question which moved her mind in an endless, an unbreakable circle. Disaster had fallen upon the Hebrews. This night had shattered their easy, their careless existence. Looking back over the indications afforded by the weeks and months just past, Jochebed could see no hope for the days to come. She was convinced, indeed, that the night through which they had passed was but the beginning of evil; and, unlike her husband, she could find no comfort in the vague promises of a faraway Yahweh for some far-off future. It was the present that mattered. It was her Aaron and her Miriam and most of all—her arm tightened gently but possessively around the bundle in the crook of her

arm—this tiny part of herself, this trusting mite, this son, for whom she was concerned. How could she save him from the evil to come? How could she protect him? There must be some way of escape.

This was the weary circle around which her mind, exhausted by the labour of her body, travelled so that she could not rest. And then a sudden flash of thought broke the circle. The Princess Bint-Anath! Was she not half-Syrian, the daughter of a Syrian mother? And were they not friends or, at least, as friendly as the wife of a Hebrew jeweller could be with a daughter of the Pharaoh? And was not Bint-Anath starved for a child? You could see it in her eyes when she looked at Aaron, in her hands when she drew him on her knee. Out of that sympathy might come protection.

"Amram!" she called, forcing her voice to a cry. "Amram!"

He was in the room, concerned, tender, with the tenderness and gentleness she loved in him.

"Nadab!" she whispered. "Get Nadab. We must send him to the Princess Bint-Anath at once."

"The Princess?"

"Yes. Don't wait there. Amram. I can't take time to explain. Get Nadab. I'll tell him what to do."

On this same morning the Princess Bint-Anath was in the act of dismissing her husband.

"I said, 'get out,'" she observed dispassionately.

The triple chins of Prince Dedi quivered pathetically. "But, darling——"

"I'm in no mood for you. Get out."

"If I were to go to the physician's again? Or to the old man in the cliffs back of the pyramids? They say his spells are potent."

"No spells would do you any good—you and your fat belly. I want a child. You can't give me one."

"But——"

"You're supposed to govern Kush, aren't you? Well, go to Kush—and stay there."

It began to be evident to Prince Dedi that his wife really meant what she was saying. Dedi, in the pathetic way of fat men, loved this imperious, this beautiful daughter of the Pharaoh. He felt despair. Falling on his knees, he began to babble entreaties, to make promises.

"Don't send me away. Let me stay near you, at least. I won't trouble you. By the ram's horns of Amon——"

Bint-Anath looked round. There was a mirror handy. She picked it up, balancing it for a blow. Prince Dedi scrambled

hastily to his feet and backed away, looking absurdly like an affectionate but frightened woolly dog.

"Now—will—you—get—out?" the Princess asked.

When her husband had left, Bint-Anath wandered about the room restlessly, picking up a fan here, another object there, and setting them down again. She had already decided that she would persuade her father as soon as she saw him to give definite orders for Prince Dedi to return to Kush. But that didn't solve her real problem.

The Princess had reached her vanity table. She sat down and, taking up her silver mirror—its handle of obsidian mounted with gold and electrum and lapis and carnelian—regarded herself in it, examining the proud clear features which looked back at her—the imperious eyes, the high-bridged nose, the patrician mouth.

But this morning the sight of her own beauty gave her no pleasure. She put down the mirror, leaned her elbows on the table, supported her chin on her two hands and looked into space. Bint-Anath did not herself understand why she desired a child so passionately. She had no means of knowing that within her the femininity which had come to her from her dead Syrian mother warred against and yet conspired with the love of power which she inherited from her father, the Pharaoh. She knew, however, that she somehow felt that a woman without a child was not complete, especially in a court in which a childless woman was an object of pity; and at the same time it had occurred to her more than once that, in the struggle for power, a woman was hampered by her sex, while a son, with herself to guide him, would have no limits set upon him.

These were considerations which influenced her. But, above and beyond these, when it came to the final point, there was a deep hunger within herself, a passionate longing which she could not explain. Ever since she had grown up, in spite of her pride and coldness and her fierce lust for power, the sight of a youngster—like Aaron, for instance—had always been enough to make her heart grow soft and her being ache with the need to caress, to hold that child in her arms. It had been with joy and satisfaction that she had believed herself to be pregnant. Now that this belief and hope had turned out to be an illusion, all her desire for a child seemed to have been sharpened and intensified. Yet, what could she do about it?

The Princess did not know. Being a woman she might—and did—prefer to believe that the fault lay with Prince Dedi, especially since she wanted to get rid of a husband who was distasteful to her. Within herself, however, she was conscious that Dedi's lack of virility was not the whole answer. Her other men were

proof of that fact. No, it seemed that for some reason she was denied the child which she desired. And what to do about it?

With a petulant exclamation Bint-Anath shifted her position. She looked at her jewel casket. It was a lovely thing made of ebony and panelled in ivory and gold and blue faience. The Princess examined the jewellery in it half-heartedly, fingering this piece and that, and finally pulled out a necklace. Rubies sparkled there, alternated with beads of garnet and gold. She let it dangle from her fingers, unregarded. A child—why could she not have a child?

Why not adopt one—a boy? The question was almost as clear as if it were spoken. Bint-Anath let the necklace drop. She rose from the chair, and stood, pressing with the palms of her hands on the table. Adoption was easy—and common. All she needed was the Pharaoh's consent. But there was one objection. Everyone would know that such an adopted son was not her own child—and the boy himself would in due time come to learn of it—and, if she were to adopt a son—so Bint-Anath felt deeply—that son must never know that he was not her son. He must be hers—and hers alone. Yes, she turned from the table, if there were some way to surmount that objection . . .

The Princess walked slowly over to the window. The sun was just poking his rim above the eastern hills. If she could but think of some way to overcome that one objection.

It was at this moment that Nadab, the servant of Jochebed, was announced.

At about this same moment Intef came out into his garden, which ran down to the Nile. Amenirtis was still sleeping, a dreamless, restful sleep, and there was no doubt now that the fever was gone. Intef knew a great thankfulness as he walked among the trimmed shrubs and the formal beds of convolvuli and scarlet lilies and yellow daisies. Yet his brow was furrowed as he came to the river bank and looked at Memphis. In the rays of the sun, just risen, its walls stood out clear, etched with light. Intef knew, though he shrank away from the knowledge, what must have happened within those walls in the night just past. It occurred to him that in the old days, the days before the Hyksos had taught their Asiatic ways of torture to the Egyptians and before the empire, such things could not have happened. Death—yes. The rod for punishment and for justice—yes. But not torture, not the rape of a defenceless people because they were defenceless and were aliens. Life in the old days before the empire, as he read of it in the papyrus rolls in his library, had been kindly and joyous and simple. Now, with empire and with this flood of wealth and

slaves from the wars of conquest and with Egypt overrun by foreigners, by Asiatics and Nubians and Libyans, there was more than death. Now—there was the joy in cruelty, in impalements, in floggings to death, in the flaying alive of tortured bodies.

These reflections did not, however, solve the question which had been exercising him since his interview with the Pharaoh. Should he go to Rameses and resign his viziership or not? It would mean that his head would roll in the dust. It would mean that some other noble, less sympathetic than he to the Hebrews, would be set up in his stead. Above all, it would bring disgrace, and perhaps, worse, to his wife and infant daughter.

When a man has a wife and daughter he has fettered his freedom. Intef glanced at the western cliffs, a rugged rampart of gold in the rising sun. What was the use of reflection? he asked himself, coming back towards the villa, his head bowed. He knew that he would not do anything. How could one do anything in the Egypt of the present? The Pharaoh held it in the hollow of his hand. The Pharaoh had his barbaric Sherden with their crescent helmets and his black Nubians and his grinning, amoral Libyans. And the Pharaoh was ruthless. Yet how could he face his friends, Manoh, the Hebrew architect, and Elon, the writer, and Nun, the physician. Above all, how could he live with himself and do nothing? Consider Nun, whose skill had saved his wife from death. That was a service a civilized man could not, should not forget.

Intef paused as an idea occurred to him. It was not much—though even to do that much would be a risk in view of the Pharaoh's attitude. Still, it would be something—something to make him feel that he was not altogether less than a man. Yes, he would do it.

He walked into the villa decisively. At this moment he heard shouting in the servants' quarters. Before he had time to do more than wonder what was the cause of it, Apriki, his trusted steward, came running towards him.

"The inundation, master," Apriki cried. "Word has just come. It has reached Thebes."

Too late by a day, thought Intef.

"It is a sign from the gods," exclaimed Apriki. "A sign against the Hebrews. So soon as the Pharaoh punished them, then the inundation came."

Intef realized that this would be the common interpretation. But he had another matter to take up with Apriki. He said:

"Apriki, I have a task for you."

"Yes, master."

"Take my guards. Go into Memphis."

"Into Memphis, master?"

"Yes. You know the house of Nun, the physician. Search him out, him and his wife. Bring them here."

Apriki looked startled. "But they are Hebrews, master."

"Of course, they are Hebrews. They are also my friends."

Apriki bowed submissively. "Very well, master."

"And not a word to anyone. Understand? Not a word."

"Yes, master."

CHAPTER IV

THREE successive months had followed each other into the deep maw of the past. During those months the Pharaoh had worked his will on the Hebrews. Their possessions had been stripped from them. Their newborn babes had been flung to the crocodiles. Their women had been raped at the pleasure of the mobs and the soldiers. Their men had been kicked and beaten and, if they protested or resisted still other things, more terrible and more destroying, had happened to them. Gradually they had all been assembled in camps under guard and, although the movement was hampered to a certain extent by the inundation, bands of them had already been started along the raised roads towards the Land of Goshen. Stories of what was happening on those marches had already drifted back to Memphis. They made the heart shudder.

The knowledge of all this was in Intef's mind as he stood this morning on the roof of his villa and looked at Nun, the physician. The sword-cut across his friend's face had healed, leaving a red weal which ran from chin to temple. But the wound within him was not cured. Staring at Nun's blank face and dead, lack-lustre eyes Intef despaired of reaching into his heart. Anger, desire for revenge, tears of despair—these things would have been comprehensible and could have been combated. But not this dead, dull blankness, this even-toned apathy.

The vizier sighed. He glanced over the inundation. Although it was beginning to recede, it still stretched almost to the hills on either side, a reddish yellow flood, rippleless as a mirror and in it the clumps of palms and the acacias stood up foreshortened and the white villages were like mirrored islands. Clouds of wild-fowl skimmed the water or floated on it. There were clouds of insects, too, and the croaking of the frogs was a constant chorus, so usual and so insistent that one's ears had become accustomed to it. Over the water on rafts and boats the villagers were swarming. You could hear their laughter, enjoying holiday as they drew up the silver-scaled fish or struck down the birds,

knowing that soon the life-giving waters would abate and soon all Egypt would be an emerald level of springing wheat and barley. Intef looked back at his friend.

"It's ridiculous," he said. "What possible good can you do your people?"

Nun shrugged his shoulders.

"The Pharaoh will show no mercy," Intef argued. "Not since that attempt to assassinate him. Nor is there any other hope for the Hebrews. No, although there are those amongst us who sympathize with you, who feel that something should be done, that such things should not be allowed to happen, nothing will be done. What can be done—against the Pharaoh?"

There was a glimmering of a spark in Nun's eyes. "I know," he said. "Human sympathy is a watery thing."

Intef walked to the edge of the roof. In the garden below him he could hear the shouts and laughter of his infant daughter and in a moment she came into view, chasing her tame monkey along the path. "I'm not proud of myself," he remarked over his shoulder. "I'm not proud of any of us."

Nun sat down in a chair under a striped awning of yellow and blue. The conversation did not really interest him. His mind was made up. He did realize that Intef meant well. But he felt a certain bitterness within him which made him say:

"I understand—yes, only too well. What is happening to us Hebrews is a nine days' wonder. Your friends say: 'How terrible!' and in the next breath they talk of their new villa or of the latest shipload of merchandise from Punt or the last shadow show they have seen. I've heard them. Soon what has happened to us will have the unreality of distance. Your friends will remember less frequently. They will shrug their shoulders. They'll say: 'Oh, I suppose the Hebrews are getting on somehow. And, after all, they did have objectionable qualities.' That's what they'll say, even the most liberal and humane amongst you. I don't blame them—or you. Why should you stick your necks out to the axe? Why should you risk your lives and the lives of your wives and children for the sake of the Hebrews?"

Intef walked over to him. "I'm afraid you're right. But what can I do?"

"Nothing. I'm not blaming you—or your friends. You can't expect humanity to fight for the faraway sufferings of others, no matter how horrible they are. The world isn't civilized enough for that."

Intef was silent for a moment. He knew as well as Nun that people do not fight for others except when their own safety or

comfort or power is in danger. Look at himself. That touch of bitterness in Nun's voice, however, he reflected hopefully, might mean that he was beginning to come alive again. Of course, the shock of what had happened to his wife was enough to unbalance any man. Suppose it had been Amenirtis!

But Intef couldn't really imagine its being Amenirtis. Amenirtis was an Egyptian, not a Hebrew. But Amenirtis was insistent that he save Nun from himself. He tried again.

"You can see, then, that the case of your people is hopeless?"

"Of course. Nothing can save them."

"Then why not accept my offer? Don't be a fool, Nun. There is a boat leaving for Sidon today. I'll give you a letter to the governor. In Phoenicia you will be safe."

"No."

"But why, man? What possible reason can you have to go to Goshen? And you have no ties——"

Intef checked himself, realizing his unfortunate reference. A spasm of pain contorted Nun's face. The red weal throbbed on his face. He got up and walked to the parapet, using all his will power to block off that horrible, that deadly picture which was seared forever on the retina of his mind. His wife—naked—and the soldiers—one after another . . . He had gone back to his home—under the protection of Intef's men—just once. It had been too much for him. He had fainted away. And now—now—why not fling himself from this parapet.

He got control of himself, trembling. He ought, he knew, to be amazed at himself for refusing Intef's offer. He, Nun, the sceptic, the cynic, the man who had always prided himself on his intelligence, who had always held that life should be guided by reason rather than emotion, to think of going to join the Hebrews in Goshen. Intef, who had come across the information in the process of checking the possessions of the Hebrews in Memphis, had already pointed out to him that his friend Amram together with his wife and their three-months-old son and their two other children, were still in Memphis, under the protection of the Princess Bint-Anath. But he was not Amram. And there was his dead wife. What did it matter what happened to him? Though he must not think of his wife, his soft-eyed Ruth. True, he could do nothing in Goshen. As a reasonable man he realized that resistance was useless, that the hope of revenge was futile. Yet, in the crazy pattern of things which men called life, one never knew. Besides there was something more, something within himself of which, calling himself a man of the ages, he had not been conscious until this persecution arose.

"Well, my friend," Intef's voice said gently behind him, "will you not accept my offer? It would make us—Amenirtis and myself—very happy."

Nun turned around slowly. "You forget," he said in a level voice. "I, too, am a Hebrew."

It was on this same morning that Jochebed faced the Princess Bint-Anath. Between them was the basket in which Moses lay. In the courtyard the sunlight was fresh and cool on the fig tree and on the hard-packed dirt of the floor. In its cage the linnet was singing its heart out, just as if there were no such things as human suffering and human misery. From the front of the house could be heard the faint metallic tapping of Amram's tiny hammer. From somewhere behind her she could hear Aaron quarrelling with Miriam.

These sights and sounds were in the fringe of Jochebed's consciousness. But they did not penetrate beyond the outer gates. Her whole soul was staring at the Princess, noting the strength of the high-bridged nose and the coldness of the eyes and the hint of selfishness and egotism in the curve of the mouth and in the haughty poise of the head. Until this moment, whilst her kin and friends were being dragged under the iron harrow of persecution, the mantle of the Princess' protection had been flung around Jochebed and her family. It could be continued—but at a price.

"Well?" the Princess demanded impatiently.

Unwillingly Jochebed glanced down at the basket between them. Moses was cooing as he strove earnestly to catch the fascinating unknown object above him, which was his own dimpled foot. At this moment it was like a stab in her heart to look at him.

"You have two other children," the Princess said.

Jochebed glanced up. The Princess didn't understand. No one who was not a mother could. Jochebed's face was suddenly old.

"Couldn't you—couldn't you give us your protection—without—without having him?" she asked.

The Princess regarded her coldly. Three months ago, when, summoned by Nadab, she had gone into Memphis to find Moses just born, the possibility of getting this particular child for her own had at once flashed into her mind. That his birth had come so pat on her own thoughts of adopting a son had seemed in a way like a sign from the gods. But she had taken time to think the matter over and, in the meantime, had not said a word to anyone. It was only on the previous night when she had learned that on the morrow her father, the Pharaoh, was leaving for Tanis, that she had finally reached her decision. Her reasons were

both complex and simple. Moses' birth was no deterrent. Bint-Anath, herself half-Syrian, had no prejudice against the Hebrews; and the knowledge that, in view of her father's hatred of the race, it would be dangerous to adopt a Hebrew was, in actuality, a spur to a woman to whom to suggest that there was anything which she could not or dared not do was a challenge.

Still, she had considered this aspect of the situation carefully. It was evident that Jochebed and her family would not be dangerous. Their own lives as well as the life of Moses himself would depend on the keeping of the secret. Nor could the Hebrews who had known Jochebed give the Princess away. They would be in Goshen, far removed. Even those very few who might know that Jochebed had had a child born on the night of the terror would be most unlikely to remember it or be curious about it. They would think that that child, along with the other newborn babes, had been cast to the crocodiles. In any case, in what possible way would they be able to connect the newborn son of Jochebed with the Prince of Egypt she intended Moses to become?

On this point, therefore, Bint-Anath felt inescapably secure, not knowing that through Intef, Nun was cognizant of Moses. As for the court, the very audacity of the act would be its safety. None of them would dream of Moses' being a Hebrew. Even if the little drama she intended to stage with an ark and the Nile didn't come off successfully, they would all think that it was the child of one of her friends, gotten on the wrong side of the coverlet, or, perhaps, even in spite of the improbability of it, her own come-by-chance. Her only danger was the acuteness of the Pharaoh, her father.

These were the considerations which had made the adoption seem safe. In addition, the Princess could feel that, once she got the boy, she could make him completely her own. She had already saved him from death. To that extent he was hers already. Now, thanks to her and her alone, instead of being a slave he would be a Prince of Egypt, and that, in turn, would make him entirely hers—especially if she could get the Pharaoh to agree to the further action she had in mind. But she had not expected Jochebed to object. She had anticipated that Jochebed would leap at the opportunity.

While these reflections had been passing through Bint-Anath's mind, Jochebed had been watching her anxiously, hoping against hope. She repeated her question. The Princess looked down at the child. At this moment Moses succeeded in capturing his big toe. With coos and gurgles of triumph he put it into his mouth. Bint-Anath felt a wave of emotion beyond reason or cold calcula-

tion surge up in her. Such an adorable child! Yes, she must have him—and no other. She looked up at Jochebed.

"No," she said flatly. "Unless you give me Moses, I will withdraw my protection."

"But it will be dangerous for you to adopt a Hebrew," Jochebed pointed out desperately. "If the Pharaoh. . . ."

"Leave my father to me."

"I'll—I'll have to ask Amram."

"Amram!" the Princess said. "You know—and I know—that the decision is yours, Jochebed."

Decision! Jochebed exclaimed within herself. What decision did the Princess leave her? On the one side, safety for Amram and Aaron and Miriam and herself—yes, and for Moses, too. On the other—one's mind shuddered away from it. Yes, she would have to yield. Her strong face was deeply furrowed and her lips were pressed together, as she bent down towards Moses. At that moment, the child lost his toe and, seeing the source of food and warmth bending down towards him, stretched up his chubby arms, gurgling delightedly. With a sudden gasp, Jochebed swooped down on him and caught him up to her bosom, holding him tight. She faced Bint-Anath, an emotion which was stronger than all her practicality, all her common sense flooding through her.

"But I can't, Princess," she cried wildly. "I can't. You don't know. My own son. Never to see him again. Never to hold him in my arms again. That's what you're asking. I can't."

"But it will be better for him. Think, Jochebed. He'll be a Prince, the grandson of the Pharaohs. How can you refuse?"

"I can't. It's no use asking me. No matter what happens to him—or us, I can't. We'll go through it together, whatever it is."

The Princess thought swiftly. It was more than she had intended. It would make it infinitely more dangerous; though, on the other hand, once again, its very audacity might win success. The Pharaoh, her father, liked audacity. Besides, she must have this child, this one child—no other. It made her arms feel hungry, just looking at him. And later, she could get rid of Jochebed.

"But didn't you understand?" she asked. "You're to come with the child, Jochebed. You'll be his wet-nurse. Don't you see? You'll be with him all the time, that way. Just the same as having him."

She waited, holding her breath. She saw Jochebed's face change, loosen. Her clasp on the baby relaxed. The Princess let her breath escape. She had won. In Jochebed's arms, Moses,

not knowing that a decision had been reached which would alter the whole course of his life and affect that of countless others, squirmed round in Jochebed's arms, nuzzling against her bosom, searching for the breast. Jochebed looked down at him. Yes this, her son, would grow up a Prince of Egypt. But would he still be her son? Could she, in any way, keep a part of him hers, even if he did not know that he was her son?

Reluctantly, faltering, she held out the child to the Princess.

It was a fortnight later. The Princess sat with her father on the northern balcony of his huge palace. After the heat of the day the breeze of evening, wafted across the Northland from the Great Sea, was cool and grateful. Immediately below the two, in the green gardens between the palace and the outer wall, where the white waterlilies rested heavy on the pools and the grass and shrubs and flowers drank up the water from the tiny irrigation channels, the women of the hareem walked, and little whispers of conversation, interrupted now and then by clear trills of laughter, drifted up to them.

The Pharaoh was at peace. His stroke against the Hebrews had been successful. His treasury was full. The labour was ready. He himself had just returned from his visit to Tanis, which he was planning to transform from a somewhat insignificant town into a great city with villas and obelisks and temples and a colossal statue of himself. He felt relaxed—and at the same time the back of his mind was looking forward pleasurable to the time when, later in the evening, he would enter his hareem. The blonde virgin of the Mitanni had lost her interest. But there was a luscious dark-eyed Syrian woman who had been added to his collection during his absence. In his opinion, she looked as if she would be—skilled.

It occurred to him that his daughter, under her pretence of unconcern, was watching him anxiously. The Pharaoh took a sip of wine from the goblet on the table beside him. His mind turned to the story Bint-Anath had just told him. It seemed logical enough. From time immemorial unwanted children had been committed to the Nile and that his daughter should stumble by chance upon this Aahmose, as she called him, was quite natural. But Rameses felt within himself that there was a flaw in the story somewhere.

He frowned a little, drumming with his fingers on the arm of his chair. Then he leaned back, smiling in satisfaction as his mind put its finger on the flaw. His daughter—if he knew her—would never have wanted to adopt a haphazard discovery, a boy who might be a peasant's son or even a slave's. No, that much was certain. Well, before he gave his consent, he'd find out what the

real facts were. His eyes slid round to Bint-Anath, trying to sit back casually in her chair.

"That story of finding a child in an ark among the bulrushes," he observed pleasantly, "is so old it smells like Egypt after the inundation."

Bint-Anath had felt herself reasonably secure. Everyone else had accepted without question the little drama which she and Jochebed had staged while the Pharaoh was away, and it had only been the fact that even to her the Pharaoh was somewhat unpredictable which had made her a trifle anxious. Still she had thought that she had guarded against her father's acuteness by having her interview with him at an hour when he was usually off-guard and relaxed. It took her a moment now to realize that she hadn't succeeded. Then she sat up abruptly.

"Why, Father. . . ."

"It was told, centuries ago, if I remember rightly," Rameses went on, smiling broadly, "about the discovery of Sargon of Akkad, also by a woman. No, you'll have to do better than that, Daughter."

Bint-Anath thought swiftly. No use to persist in her story about the ark—now. To do so would be to destroy her father's good humour—and his good humour was important. But if she could appeal to his vanity—

She leaned back in her chair and smiled up at Rameses.

"I knew it would never deceive you," she said with just the right emphasis on the last word. "But it will do for the court."

Rameses nodded, well pleased with himself. "What is the real story?" he asked.

"The child of one of my friends—" she improvised. "No one here. A woman in one of the cities of Egypt. You understand—a jealous husband—who's been away for some time but is returning—that sort of thing."

Rameses nodded again. But he could think of a dozen—no, a hundred—husbands who could meet this particular specification, since in these days of empire Egyptians were in Nubia or among the Libyans or up in Canaan or Syria or Phoenicia or down in Sinai.

"Who is the woman—and her husband?" he asked.

This, of course, was one thing about which Bint-Anath did not dare to falsify. To do so would be to invite detection and the consequent disaster. She said, sparring for time as she cast about desperately for a means to make the Pharaoh forget his question:

"The point is I want to adopt the boy."

Rameses laughed. "You seem to have done so already."

"Subject to your consent, Father."

"You know, of course, that I won't refuse you. You knew that before you came here. But who are the parents?"

Bint-Anath said suddenly, viciously: "It's all your fault, anyway."

The Pharaoh sat up. "Mine?"

"Yes. That I have to adopt a child, I mean. You, marrying me off to that Dedi—that—that bowl of jelly! Me, your own daughter! A man who is more of a woman than a man! A man who hasn't a child to his name—not even among the slave girls. What could you have been thinking of?"

Rameses wasn't anxious to enter into any discussion of this. At the time, since Dedi's family lived on the borders of Kush and had strong connections in that country, he had decided that to marry Dedi to his daughter would be to make his hold on Kush secure. To mention this, he knew from previous arguments, would only increase his daughter's anger. She would want to know if he had looked upon her as a chattel, a thing, and not, as he had often told her, as his favourite daughter. She would become furious. She would get up and tramp about, heaping insults on Dedi and, finally, on himself. Bint-Anath, like himself, had a temper. The quarrel, once started, might well last well into the night. And he had other things, more pleasant things, in mind.

"I'll grant that you can adopt the boy," he said hastily, forgetting the question he had asked and which Bint-Anath hadn't answered. "What more can you want?"

Bint-Anath relaxed, smiling inside herself at the success of her tactics. The rest, now that the danger point had been evaded, ought to be easier. But she must push it along. She said:

"One other thing."

"What?"

Bint-Anath paused. When she spoke it was with an undertone of passion.

"I want a decree—from you—that, from now henceforth, no one, on pain of death, shall ever refer to the child—my Aahmose—as being other than my own son, the child of my own womb."

The Pharaoh looked at her, frowning a little. "Why?"

"The boy's not to know," Bint-Anath explained, her eyes flashing. "He's never to know that he's not my son—mine. Can't you understand? I want him to feel that he's my son, my own, not an adopted one."

Rameses picked up his goblet. "Well——"

"Please."

"Very well." Rameses took a drink. "Is that all?"

"There's just one thing more."

Rameses put down the goblet. "What is it, this time?"

Bint-Anath got up. "It's not important," she said, gathering her gown about her as if to leave. "It's just that I've tried several wet-nurses. Their milk didn't suit. I was afraid of the boy's dying on my hands. I've got one now who suits perfectly. I want to keep her."

"What's to prevent you?"

"She's a Hebrew."

Rameses was on his feet, frowning. "Hebrew!"

"Now, Father——"

"A Hebrew. A slut of a Hebrew! By Ra and by Amon——"

"Listen, Father, I'm not asking you for all of the Hebrews. Just one—and her family."

"What!"

"If her family weren't safe, her milk would turn bad," Bint-Anath explained in a tone of reasonableness. "You can understand that, even if you are a man."

"But a Hebrew——"

"Please." Bint-Anath came up to him. She put a graceful hand in his arm and looked up at him appealingly, softly. For an instant, looking down at her, Rameses was reminded unwillingly of her mother, that soft-eyed Syrian princess whom he had taken on that night after his victory at Kadesh and who had died before he could have his fill of her.

"Please—Father," Bint-Anath repeated.

The Pharaoh half turned away. "Well——"

Bint-Anath didn't wait. With a little cry of thanks she flung her arms around his neck and kissed him. Then, before he could set any qualifications upon his half-granted permission she was across the balcony and going down the stairs, waving back to him gaily as she disappeared. The Pharaoh sat down. There was not the slightest suspicion in his mind about Moses' race. Rameses, indeed, could not have imagined anyone, not even his daughter, having the temerity to adopt a Hebrew, and the very fact that Bint-Anath had asked for a Hebrew wet-nurse would, as she had anticipated, have removed any such suspicion if it had occurred to him. But it did cross his mind that Bint-Anath had got away without telling him who the parents of the boy were. Not that it was important. He'd ask her again sometime, if he thought of it. Meanwhile, his building programme—and a little later that Syrian woman. . . .

The Pharaoh picked up his goblet. And meanwhile Bint-Anath, as she went down the corridor of the palace and along the paved roadway to the great pylons which guarded the outer entrance, was thinking to herself:

Moses—all mine. All mine, now. My son. Mine. And he will never know he's not my son. Though I must watch Jochebed. Get rid of her as soon as it's safe. The boy can't have two mothers. He can only have one—me.

CHAPTER V

MOSES was asleep. Looking at him as he lay there, the coverlet tossed off and one arm flung out as if he were the reclining and graceful statue of some boy in sun-kissed ivory, and surrounded by that hushed quality in the room which sleep brings, it was difficult to realize that in this relaxed child's body were enclosed all the manifold potentialities for good and evil which each entity brings with it into the world; or that Moses was and had been for some seven years at once the battleground and the longed-for prize of two women, each of whom desired to possess him completely for her own. He seemed, in fact, so defenceless and so innocent in this evanescent moment and so happily oblivious of the sounds drifting up from down below in the palace, that Jochebed could scarcely prevent herself from rushing over to the couch and falling on her knees and seizing him in her arms and crying out to him:

"Wake up, Moses. It's your mother, Moses, your real mother. Not the Princess but I, your real mother."

She repressed the impulse. For seven years she had been repressing it; and only those few who have watched their son grow up as the child of another and have not been able, by word or hint, to let him know who he really is, can comprehend the stored-up bitterness within her. Time after time she had seen Moses turn from her to run with eager outstretched arms to the woman he believed to be his mother. Time after time she had had to stand by and watch her son caressed and given things which were not good for him; and, seeing the look of triumph in the eyes of the Princess Bint-Anath, had felt that she must speak out. Yet how could she?

This was the question Jochebed put to herself for the thousandth time and sighed wearily, and, for an instant, her strong quiet face was deep and withdrawn and unutterably melancholy. Then she steadied herself. What was done was done; and there was a great deal to be seen to this morning in view of the dinner which Bint-Anath was giving this evening. For a moment, she considered going into the room and rearranging the coverlet or, at least, brushing away the curly sidelock which had fallen

forward into the boy's eyes. But that might waken the lad. Turning, she went down the stairs.

The morning sun, however, had other ideas about the sleeper. For some time its rays, like searching invaders, had been trying to find a way through the tangled tops of the trees in the garden. Now, shortly after Jochebed had left, they discovered a crevice. Reaching through, they filtered across the sill of the opened window and touched the boy's face. He stirred restlessly this way and that, flung his arm around, shifted again and awoke. For a brief moment he remained quiet, suspended between waking and memory, his liquid eyes, blank of thought, taking in without conscious reflection the depth and the greenness and the scarlet bird swaying on a bough and the sun winking through the interstices of the leaves. Then, he remembered. This was the day! His face came alive. In what seemed to be one instantaneous movement the boy was out of bed and into the kilt and sandals he had left ready the night before. It took only a second more to snatch up his throwing stick and dash out of the room and down the stairs. The gold-plated columns of the tall corridor which bisected the palace gleamed dully in the morning light, as if they were the guardians of some ancient shrine. Moses did not notice them. In the same fury of intense activity and expectation he darted into the suite of rooms where the Princess Bint-Anath slept. Nofti, the Nubian girl who was in the outer room putting clothes into a cedar chest, looked up as he went by. She heard him calling out: "Mother! Mother! Where are you?" and there was the hint of a sneer on her thick lips. And then Moses was back in the room again.

"Where's my mother?" he demanded.

To Nofti, Moses was not a lovable though somewhat spoiled youngster but an overbearing imp of Set.

"I don't know, young master," she answered with an affection of stupidity, bending down to pick up a pleated tunic, her heavy breasts, bare of covering, swaying as she moved.

"She must be around," Moses insisted. "You must have seen her. Where is she?"

Nofti permitted herself a sly smile. She straightened, and began to fold the tunic.

"She went out," she told Moses.

"Went out! But today's the boat ride. Today's the day she's taking me and Sinuhe across the river."

"Well, boat ride or no boat ride," Nofti said, being very careful to get each pleat exactly right, "she went out with your uncle, Prince Merneptah."

"Uncle Merneptah?"

"Yes."

"When will she be back? When did she say she'd be back?"

"She didn't say." Nofiti turned to put the tunic into the chest. "And I'd say, young master," she added over her shoulder, "that you needn't expect her back, boat ride or no boat ride. Not when she's out with Prince Merneptah."

Moses stared at the girl's sleek back, a dozen chaotic thoughts tumbling about in his brain. His uncle, Prince Merneptah, so high and mighty in his curled wig and his elaborate tunic and his pointed sandals coming around his mother's palace every day these past ten days and walking about as if he owned it. His uncle, Prince Merneptah, looking down his nose at him and tapping him out of the way with his gilded cane. And his mother, the mother whom Moses worshipped with an adoration which was close to idolatry, following Prince Merneptah around with her eyes and for the first time in Moses' young life, seeming to forget all about him, when Uncle Merneptah was around. The picture suddenly brought to the boy's mind again what he had heard Aunt Jochebed saying the day before when she hadn't known that he was in the next room. But that couldn't be true, he told himself fiercely. No, it couldn't. And his mother couldn't have forgotten about the boat ride and the picnic. Not when they'd been planning it for a week.

"You're lying, slave," he burst out as Nofiti turned around. "I tell you, you're lying. She's coming back. What time did she say she was coming back?"

Slaves can have their own ideas about their mistresses. Nor was Nofiti sorry to see this brat get his come-uppance for once.

"She's not coming back," she told him bluntly and with satisfaction. "I heard her tell Prince Merneptah. They've taken a hamper with them. You might as well know, young master," she went on, sneering, "that when Prince Merneptah comes around——"

But Moses didn't let her finish. To have this slave girl, too, hinting things about his mother! By Set, she shouldn't.

"Shut up, I tell you," he commanded.

But Nofiti possessed a certain malicious obstinacy as well as a complete lack of sensitivity. "When Prince Merneptah comes around, your mother——" she began again, doggedly.

The boy's temper boiled over. "Shut up," he shrieked and at the same moment struck at her viciously with his throwing stick. The girl, forgetting, caught it. In a furious burst of rage Moses wrenched it free.

"Slave!" he cried, hitting at her savagely. "I'll teach you."

Nofti made no resistance this time. She had remembered. You didn't resist young masters, not unless you wanted the hide cut off you later. She'd learned that lesson. Crouching down, she put her hands over her face, taking the blows on her arms.

"Don't, young master," she begged, twisting her body this way and that. "Don't."

"What's going on here?" Jochebed's voice asked from the doorway.

Moses stopped in the very act of striking. He looked over his shoulder. With a somewhat guilty air he stepped back, lowering the stick and trying unostentatiously to conceal it at his side. Nofti crouched where she was, looking up fearfully from between her fingers. Jochebed came into the room.

"What's the trouble?" she inquired.

Moses looked at the floor and said nothing. The slave girl rose to her feet. The words began to tumble out of her. Jochebed stopped her with a gesture.

"I'm asking you, Moses," she said.

The boy began to draw circles with the toe of his sandal around a bird in the gold mosaic of the floor. He knew that the woman he believed to be his nurse loved him. That knowledge had, indeed, been implanted in him from before the time when he could remember with his conscious memory. It had also been impressed on him that, in spite of that love, one could only go so far with Aunt Jochebed. Prince of Egypt though he was, if she thought he needed it—and if the Princess wasn't around—up would go his little bottom and a broad palm smacked down on the place which invited it. Yet Moses didn't want to tell the real reason why he had struck Nofti, not with the recollection fresh and raw in his mind of what he had heard Aunt Jochebed saying about his mother.

"I'm waiting, Moses," Jochebed reminded him.

There was no help for it. Moses blurted out:

"I asked her when my mother would be back. She wouldn't tell me."

"Is that all?"

"She said she wouldn't be back at all." Moses looked up. "That's a lie. Today's the boat ride. Of course she'll be back."

He saw Aunt Jochebed's lips press together and was abruptly afraid that she would say something to his face about his mother and Uncle Merneptah, feeling that if she did it would make it more real.

"I say she'll be back," he declared, his voice rising. "Of course, she'll be back."

Jochebed said gently, "I'm afraid not, Moses."

"She promised. There's Sinuhe, too. He'll be coming over. I tell you she promised."

"She's just forgotten," Jochebed told him. "She'll take you tomorrow."

"I don't want tomorrow. I want today."

Jochebed looked at his mutinous, sulky face, realizing that the tears were very close to the surface. She hesitated, understanding in part that to a child the immediate present is intensely important so that what seems to an adult a very small matter can block off the universe for a boy. But she did not comprehend Moses' intensity wholly, seeing that she did not realize either his jealousy of his uncle, or, above all, the uneasy feeling within him of something about the relations between Merneptah and his mother which the boy did not wish to face and of which the forgetting about the boat ride was a symptom. Instead, the very fact that her heart was torn with yearning, though Moses did not know it, to take her son into her arms and cuddle him and tell him not to mind made her manner more abrupt. She said decisively: "Well, you can't have today. You'll have to make the best of it, Moses."

"I won't," Moses blazed out. "I'll show her. I'll run away. Where no one can find me. She'll be sorry."

"Moses!"

"I will. I tell you, I will."

Jochebed considered. She glanced at the slave girl.

"Hadn't you better apologize to Nofiti first?" she suggested quietly.

Apologize to Nofiti! Apologize to a slave! Aunt Jochebed couldn't mean it. His mother, the Princess, would have laughed and said: "Strike her again." But Aunt Jochebed's face told him she did mean it. "It's not her fault, you know," she reminded him.

Moses glanced sideways. There was a grin on Nofiti's thick, stupid face. Abruptly, he made up his mind. Before Jochebed could realize what he intended, he had ducked past her and was out the door, and she heard his footsteps rushing down the corridor. Stepping to the entrance she looked after him, knowing that it was of no use to call to him. Once again, watching his sturdy little figure disappear into the garden, the reluctant thought recurred to her that, perhaps, Amram had seen more clearly than herself, that, possibly, seven years ago, she ought to have put her trust in Yahweh and refused her child to the Princess.

Yet how could she have refused? What mother would have refused? Jochebed stared down the corridor, not seeing the tall

pillars or the brilliant frescoes on the walls. True, the boy was arrogant. True, he was selfish. How could he be otherwise? He lived in palaces and villas; and every palace and every villa blazed, as this one did, with splendour, with gold-plated columns and silver mosaics and swarms of slaves and rooms painted with brilliant frescoes or hung with priceless tapestries and crowded with precious objects, with cedar chests and vases inlaid with gold and the blue of lapis lazuli, with silver mirrors and charming statues and tables inset with boxwood and the creamy sheen of mother-of-pearl.

It was not the right environment for Moses. Besides, the Princess spoiled him. The Princess gave him everything a boy's heart could desire. The Princess laughed when he struck a slave or cursed at a peasant. The Princess was always drumming into his ears that he was a Prince of Egypt and a grandson of the Pharaoh. And she, Jochebed, could not speak out. She could not cry: "No, Moses, no! You're not an Egyptian. You're my son, mine!" Yes, in the battle between them, Bint-Anath had always had the upper hand. True, despite the Princess, she had taught Moses Hebrew and the Hebrew legends of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, as well as the Hebrew prayers to Yahweh, feeling that this much was owed to Amram. Every now and then, also, she had been able to take him up secretly to Memphis to see his real father, without Moses, of course, knowing the truth. Yet, what were those poor attempts in comparison to what the Princess could offer him? And the boy adored the Princess. That, indeed, was the root of the trouble today.

Behind her, Nofti, who had finished with the clothes, coughed tentatively, recalling Jochebed to the present.

"What shall I do now?" Nofti asked.

"There are the other rooms to be cleaned, aren't there?" Jochebed answered briefly.

She turned towards the stairs, remembering that she hadn't checked that part of the house yet or been to the kitchens where there was a little matter to take up with Uni, the steward. At the same time she reminded herself that you couldn't have it two ways. She had made her choice seven years ago.

And how could she have chosen otherwise? Take those Hebrews in Goshen, whom Amram, in his desire to do whatever was possible for his people, visited as often as he could. The tales he told of what happened to them! Or take those poor wretches she herself had seen in Tanis last month, starved and gaunt, their chests heaving, their faces hopeless as they pulled at the ropes and the lash whistled down. Would she have Amram or Aaron or Moses

himself suffer that fate? No, she assured herself passionately as she reached the stairs, anything was better than that. Let Moses grow up a Prince of Egypt. Let him scorn the Hebrews. Let him never know that she, Jochebed, was his real mother. The whips, at least, would never cut into his naked flesh.

She had reached the conclusion at which she had arrived on a hundred similar occasions. Nor had she, hopeless though it might seem, any idea of giving up the battle for Moses. The boy wasn't *all* bad, she told herself defensively. He couldn't be all bad—not with something of Amram in him.

Amram! Jochebed stopped on the third step. Why not today? What had she been thinking of? The Princess wouldn't be back until late. Yes, as soon as she could finish her work she'd find Moses and take him up to Memphis. Even if it was dangerous, there was that much, at least, that she could do. She went up the stairs.

And meantime, outside the garden wall, in a tiny glade set at the very tip of a spit of land which jutted into the river and had, therefore, been left outside the symmetrical plan of the palace, Moses lay, face down. The scent of the bruised grass and flowers was warm in his nostrils. Around him the bees had resumed their hot, threatening hum. In front of his nose a line of ants kept on placidly with their march between a dead locust and the anthill at the foot of the palm which leaned out, drunkenly, over the river. On the broad stream beyond, the water sparkled in the sun, and the oars glistened as they dipped and fell and the gay sails bellied out lazily before the gentle breeze from the north.

But the boy did not hear the bees or see the sparkling river. He lay motionless, his fists pressed into his eyes. It was not his disappointment about the boat ride which troubled him. His suffering was caused by that which his mother's forgetting of the boat ride had drawn from the back of his mind, where he had tried to conceal it, into the foreground of his consciousness. His mother and Uncle Merneptah and what Aunt Jochebed had said bluntly about them—this was what held him here, agonized with that seemingly ephemeral intensity of emotion which belongs to childhood.

It was not that Moses was not already familiar with the intimacies between men and women. A boy of seven, living amid the frankness of Egyptian life in an Egyptian palace which swarmed with slaves, was not likely to be left in doubt for long about the cruder realities. Moses knew, for instance, which ones of his more than a score of wives and of his hundreds of concubines were

especially favoured by the Pharaoh, whom he believed to be his grandfather, and for what reasons. It was an ordinary fact to him that, by immemorial custom, the Pharaohs married their sisters; and he could have told you without circumlocution or embarrassment why men and women worshipped ithy-phallic Min or what were the rites of the Goat of Mendes; or have rattled off to you the stories of a round dozen of the love intrigues of the court.

But for a sensitive boy of seven to comprehend these details about men and women in general and to be compelled to realize them about a mother whom he has set on a pedestal are two very different things. The boy's whole body quivered as he lay on the grass. He dug his fists deeper into his eyes, trying to blot out yesterday. Yesterday, he had dashed into his mother's room, as had always been his habit, to ask if he could go swimming. Merneptah had been there, sitting on the couch with his mother, his arm around her waist. Both of them had looked at him with such a strange blank look that the boy had sensed that he had interrupted something and wasn't wanted. His mother had been the first to recover herself.

"What is it?" she had asked sharply.

"Nothing," Moses had mumbled and, feeling embarrassed and, for some reason, angry at Uncle Merneptah, had gone out sullenly.

But he had thought nothing more of it than that at the time, not until he had overheard Aunt Jochebed. What she had said so bluntly in the room, next to the one in which he had been, had stunned him. He had crept out of the place and down the corridor refusing to believe what he had overheard and even trying to pretend that he hadn't heard anything. Then, he had dashed out of the palace and found Sinuhe. Along with him he had plunged into a mad whirl of activity, teasing Mefrari, catching a couple of cats and tying their tails together, scooping the goldfish out of the lily pond and watching them flop around on the pavement, bothering Neheb, the crotchety old gardener, until he had chased him with his pruning hook, doing a hundred and one things until he was late for the evening meal and so thoroughly tired out that he had fallen asleep in the middle of it.

In this way he had prevented himself from thinking of what Aunt Jochebed had said or of what he had seen; and beneath the surface of his consciousness, his mind had been hoping that it was, after all, only a dream. He had hoped that, when he and his mother and Sinuhe were on the boat ride and picnic to which they had been looking forward, counting the days, he would find that everything was just the same as it had been. In the morning,

waking from a dreamless sleep, he had forgotten yesterday—until Nofti had brought it back.

But now there was no longer any escape. Relentlessly his memory pushed before him, as he lay here, the details of what he had seen yesterday: the couch, the flush on his mother's cheeks, the appearance of both Merneptah and his mother—as if they had hastily recovered themselves at his entrance—and, above all, the look in his mother's eyes. That look—it brought before him suddenly another picture, the picture of what he and Sinuhe had seen one afternoon when they had come on Uni and one of the slave girls in the summerhouse in the garden. They had laughed, he and Sinuhe. But now—to think of his mother—his proud, dainty mother—and Uncle Merneptah . . .

The thought was not to be endured. Moses jumped to his feet and stared about him wildly, seeing and not seeing the trees and the broad river and the ships on it and the great temple of Ptah, upstream, glittering in the sun above the squat bulk of Memphis. The boy tried to think of other things, of Sinuhe and Sinuhe's uncle, Intef, of the golden boats of the gods and, above all, the golden ark of Amon floating amid lights and splendour on the sacred lake in front of the great temple of Thebes; of the day the previous month when he and Sinuhe had run away from his mother's villa at Tanis and had come upon the Hébrew slaves heaving and pulling a huge gold-capped obelisk into place. He could remember how the whips had cracked and the look on the faces of those slaves when a rope had broken and the obelisk had tumbled back on them, crushing them, open mouths yelling. He and Sinuhe had watched it, interested.

Even so, he could not blot out that other picture, the picture that fascinated him with a horrible fascination, that drove sharp daggers of torment into him. With a sob, the boy flung himself face down in the grass again. His body writhed. It was all Uncle Merneptah's fault, he told himself, savagely and illogically, grinding his teeth and clenching his fists. When he was old enough he'd kill Uncle Merneptah. Kill him by torture. Lash him with whips. Take the skin off him in strips, slowly, as his mother had had done with that blue-eyed, barbaric Northerner last year, or bury him in sand up to his neck and smear his face with honey for the ants. Oh, if he were only grown-up now. If he could only jump into his chariot and dash after Uncle Merneptah . . .

He twisted this way and that, his mind darting around furiously like a bee shut up in a bottle. If only, boy though he was, he could do something to Merneptah now. He couldn't think of anything, at least not of anything possible and practical. But then his mind took over. It began to imagine scenes, each one

more thrilling than the last, in which Moses, boy of seven though he was, got the better of his uncle so that Merneptah had to grovel and beg for mercy. But Moses didn't show him any mercy. And his mother stood by, penitent and admiring.

The boy began to relax. He did not, of course, realize it, but his being, wearied of beating against the stone walls of reality, had turned to the compensation of dreams. In the process the first intensity of Moses' emotion was dissipated. His subconscious perceptions began gradually to be aware of the drowsy hum of the bees and of the sun warm on his back. His eyes closed. His daydreams became more and more fantastic and divorced from reality. At last, abruptly, just as he was returning proudly to Memphis from a battle against the blue-eyed Peoples of the Sea, seven captured chieftains hanging head-downward from the prow of his galley, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER VI

A FEW miles farther down the river, the Princess Bint-Anath was spinning along in her gold-mounted chariot, the nostrils of her aristocratic, high-bridged nose flaring, as she revelled in the bright fields and the sense of rushing speed.

"Look out," Merneptah cried, snatching at the reins as they swung round the corner on two wheels. By exerting all his strength he was just able to turn the horses enough to miss a peasant who had suddenly appeared in their path, plodding along behind his laden donkey. "Watch out where you're driving," Merneptah said, breathing hard.

The Princess laughed and snaked out the long lash of her whip.

Life, as has so often been said, is a study in contrasts. As the long lash flicked out, down in Tanis an old man who had in other days been Dathan, a prosperous merchant of Thebes, overcome by the heat and by exhaustion, fell away from the rope at which, with a score of others, he had been straining to draw along a huge block of granite. The overseer shouted harshly and brought down his whip. But the body of Dathan did not stir except as it jumped a little, mechanically, to the blows.

At this same moment, leagues to the East in the Land of Goshen, a row of men dug in the hot sun, making a new irrigation channel which had been commanded. Nun, the physician, was one of them. He sweated as he dug his spade into the rich, loamy earth. He reflected how curious it was that he, who had once

been the friend of Ipuwer, High Priest of Ra, and welcome at the table of Intef, should now be digging at a ditch, his hair and beard unkempt, his only garment a filthy loin cloth.

Yet he was no stranger a figure than his companions. He glanced at them briefly. There was Koher, who had been an architect in Memphis, and Simeon, whose ships had once gone out to Cyprus and to Palestine and to the cities of Phoenicia, and Balak, whose shop had woven the finest linen in Egypt. Who were they now? Dirty ragged labourers, sweating under the lash. You could smell them, yes, even himself.

And it did not seem strange, even to himself, except at odd moments like this. So soon, indeed, did the extraordinary become the accustomed, and the outrageous, the habitual. Yes, he, Nun, the debonair physician, who once had had a luxurious home in Memphis and a wife whose beauty—

He blocked off the recollection savagely, telling himself that, for a slave, the habits of memory and reflection were a curse. Amram, he supposed, would call what had happened on that terrible night, "the will of Yahweh." Well, Amram had feathered his own niche well; or rather, Jochebed had feathered it for him. The fact remained, however, that Amram didn't toil in the hot sun. The fact remained that he dwelt in Memphis with Aaron and that Jochebed and Miriam and the infant Moses—though he would be a boy of, let's see, seven now—lived in the palace of the Princess Bint-Anath. Yes, "the will of Yahweh" had worked out well for Amram. Though he couldn't blame Amram for the choice which he himself had made. It was a choice which had, probably, been inevitable. For, at the last, Nun sneered to himself, as he dumped down a spadeful of earth, he, Nun, who had thought himself a citizen of the world, had discovered that he was a Hebrew. He supposed that was it. Once a Hebrew, always a Hebrew.

"Did you hear?" his neighbour whispered out of the corner of his mouth. "They say Naphtali's caught."

"Caught?"

"Yes. The Egyptians——"

"Stop that talking," a guard roared. His lash came hissing down. "Get to work, you filth, you dogs."

Nun bent to his digging. Amram would call this, too, the "will of Yahweh", he told himself with a curl to his lip. Amram was always babbling during the visits which he made in secret to Goshen, about "the will of Yahweh", and "by suffering doth He prepare us for the road He would have us tread", and, foolishly too, about a "Deliverer", a magic "Deliverer", who would some day free the Hebrews from bondage.

Nun reflected that he would like to ask Amram what one could see of Yahweh, or of any other god except a malignant one, in the case of Naphtali? Naphtali had been a quiet, inoffensive young man, one who wouldn't, as the saying went, say "no" to a rabbit. But Naphtali's wife, a slim doe-eyed girl, had come to the notice of an overseer. He had taken her and when he was tired of her, had turned her over to the guards. Nothing unusual in that. One had become accustomed to that, too, in the seven years in Goshen. But ten days ago that particular overseer—Sakere, his name was—had been found dead in a ditch, his head bashed in. Naphtali had disappeared. Now, he was caught. And now Naphtali would die under the torture as his brothers and his sisters and his mother and his father had been dying. Could one call that "the will of Yahweh"?

No, Nun told himself fiercely, the red weal of the old sword-cut throbbing angrily. "Yahweh"! A "Deliverer"! One ought to spit when Amram talked. No, there was no hope for the Hebrews, none. A nation of slaves, crushed into the mud by the Pharaoh. And nobody cared. This was the measure of the boasted and ancient civilization of the Egyptians, of all civilization, for that matter. Nobody cared, unless the lash fell or seemed likely to fall on their own backs. Humanity was not civilized, would never be civilized. For that matter humanity wasn't intelligent enough, in the mass, to become civilized. Ruthlessness. Power. Selfishness. Chance. Those were the four chariots which overrode the world. Take Moses, that child whom his mother, Jochebed, had saved from the terror. By that particular accident of fate Moses wouldn't labour in the hot sun or die as Naphtali would die. No, Moses would grow up an Egyptian prince and, perhaps, without knowing it, be one who oppressed his own people. Though it was somewhat ironical that the Pharaoh, who hated the Hebrews, should have a Hebrew for a grandson and not know it. Nun decided that he must point that fact out to Amram when he came next. He would tell him that this, indeed, required a Yahweh with a sense of the dramatic and the humorous. He paused to wipe the sweat out of his eyes.

"Put some guts into it," the voice of the guard bellowed in his ear, and he heard the lash swing up.

Back in the palace of Bint-Anath below Memphis, Jochebed, having finished the inspection of the upstairs, was completing her laying down of the law to Uni, the steward, while the kitchen help stood round and grinned.

"Only fit for cattle," she concluded, tossing a melon back on the heap and watching it split open, rotten-ripe. "Making an

arrangement with the headman of the Princess' village to sell the best of the crop in Memphis and to give the palace the refuse. Thinking, actually thinking, I wouldn't smell it out. I'm surprised at you, Uni. Well, I won't tell the Princess this time. But, don't forget, Uni, you'll have to keep your sandals tied on tight from now henceforth."

She waited. Uni, a thin, goggle-eyed man, swallowed once or twice, unpleasantly conscious that the plump kitchen-wench, Mefrari, whom he had been impressing, with a view to slipping off into a corner with her some dark night soon, was sniggering at him. This slut of a Hebrew, he thought. Just wait till he got back at her.

"Yes, Jochebed," he said submissively.

"Well, see that you remember it," Jochebed told him. She walked out of the kitchen, her conscience clear and all her work done. Moses returned to her mind. Going into the corridor she saw Miriam coming from the garden.

"Did you find him?" she asked.

Miriam shook her head.

"I'll go look for him myself," Jochebed decided. She glanced around her and lowered her voice. "I'm taking him to Memphis today."

"Yes, Mother."

"The Princess will be late. I'll be back before she returns. But don't tell anyone."

"No, Mother."

Jochebed looked at her daughter, seeing how thin and gangling she was and how intense the expression on her lean, sharp-featured face. It occurred to her that, at times, in her preoccupation with Moses, she forgot her other children and that they ought, properly, to resent it. But that was the way of things. The children you were sure of didn't worry you. Putting an arm around her daughter she drew her close of a moment.

"There," she said, releasing her. "Be a good girl, Miriam."

"Yes, Mother."

Down in her summerhouse by the river, with a girl behind the lattice playing softly on the flute, the branches of the trees still and deep above her head, and a tiny artificial waterfall, laced with ferns, tinkling musically close by, the Princess Bint-Anath paused in the act of placing a bunch of grapes on the pyramid of dusky dates and flushed slices of pomegranate which she had erected on a plate of translucent alabaster.

"What's the matter, darling?" Merneptah asked.

Bint-Anath arranged the grapes carefully, fully conscious that

the action displayed to advantage the beauty of her slender wrists and long, tapering fingers. "I've just remembered," she said. "I promised Moses a boat ride today."

"That brat!"

"He's not a brat," Bint-Anath took a couple of goblets out of the hamper and set them on the cloth. "We'll have to go back early."

"Whatever for?"

"I want to see Moses before the banquet. He'll be disappointed."

"Let him! Anyone would think," Merneptah went on, with an interested and watchful glance at Bint-Anath, "that he was your own son."

"Is that what they're still saying?" Bint-Anath inquired, pouring wine into the golden goblets.

"Well, my mother——"

"Your mother, the Princess Tiyy," Bint-Anath stated distinctly, "is a gossipy old harridan." She put back the jar. "What else does she say?"

"Well, she says, of course, that if he isn't your own son, he must be the child of some friend of yours. That story of the ark, you know, never deceived anyone."

Bint-Anath was somewhat sensitive about the story of the ark. She flushed.

"The point is that seven years ago the Pharaoh decreed that he was my son," she told Merneptah. "Don't let your mother forget that. You might remember that it's also his decree that no one, not anyone, is so much as to hint in the presence of that boy that he's not my own son—my very own."

"Such temper!" Merneptah reached for his goblet. "My mother also wonders why you keep that Hebrew woman around."

Since, as he finished speaking, Merneptah put the goblet to his lips, he did not perceive the sudden narrowing of Bint-Anath's eyes or the involuntary pause which held her for a second. It was only for a second. In that second, however, Bint-Anath realized that the danger which she had thought dead long ago was still alive. As she raised her own goblet to her lips she was reflecting rapidly that it would have been better if she had followed her first intention of seven years ago and had got rid of Jochebed as soon as her value as a wet-nurse was over.

But she had thought there was no danger. Besides Jochebed had made herself useful—very useful indeed—around the palace. It had been easier to let things go. And besides—so Bint-Anath granted to herself now—there had been a still more compelling

reason—that battle for the complete possession of Moses, a battle which was not over yet. To have dismissed Jochebed would have been to admit that she was afraid of her influence on the boy, to have confessed that she could not make Moses wholly her own as long as Jochebed was present. Such an admission to a woman of Bint-Anath's pride and egotism would have been unendurable.

But now—the Princess Tiyy. The Princess Tiyy was more than a malicious busybody. She was one of the shrewdest women in the court. And the Princess Tiyy hated her for her influence with the Pharaoh, as well as for snatching Merneptah right out from under her hook nose.

The Princess looked at Merneptah consideringly. He was handsome, this young gallant; and at her age it was cheering to be reassured that her mind was not her only attraction. But if this intrigue with Merneptah was, as it seemed, the cause of Tiyy's reawakened interest in Moses and Jochebed it might prove to have been an error, especially since Bint-Anath knew that her father had never been really satisfied seven years ago at her refusal to confide in him who the real parents of Moses were. Her husband was out of the way. Her husband, thanks be to Osiris, was dead these five years. But, if now, Tiyy, as a result of her reawakened interest, were to get a hint that there was something Hebraic in Moses' ancestry and were to pass that on to the Pharaoh, why, that would be disastrous. The thought made Bint-Anath feel that it was even more imperative to return to the palace as soon as possible.

"Why so silent, darling?" Merneptah asked.

Bint-Anath laughed. She leaned back, conscious that her gown of ivory-white, trimmed with gold thread, clung lovingly to her supple figure.

"Nothing," she answered, looking up at Merneptah from under provocative eyelashes.

CHAPTER VII

MOSES sat in the bow of the boat. Looking at his eager, alive face, one could scarcely have imagined that this was the boy who, that same morning, had dashed in fury at Nofti and had fled from Jochebed to fling himself face down in the grass and suffer with an intensity which had been shattering, even though apparently it had been transitory. But to children an hour is as long as a day and a day is an almost unimagined length of

time, a period in which a hundred and one things can happen and a score of moods be experienced. The wound inflicted on Moses was none the less permanent because the thrill of the journey to Memphis had, seemingly, caused him to forget his hurt.

For these trips to Memphis were an adventure to the boy. It was not only that when he went up to Memphis he was dressed in a simple kilt and had all the marks of his rank removed so that he could imagine, if he liked, that he was a spy on a dangerous mission. There was also the thrill of sneaking out the postern gate and down to the tiny cove at the back and of uncovering the boat that was there and of getting it into the river without attracting attention. It was true that Moses felt, at times, somewhat guilty at having a secret from his mother. This feeling did not trouble him today. His mother had forgotten him and he felt obscurely that this was paying her back. In addition some instinct in Moses had, long ago, made him aware of the hostility between his nurse and his mother, and of the further fact that these trips to Memphis, if revealed to the Princess, would bring trouble, terrible trouble, on Aunt Jochebed. Why, Moses didn't know; and his very lack of knowledge made the implications more sinister and more mysterious. Besides, what is the fun of a secret if there isn't something risky and something half guilty about it?

So now, Moses, who had been pretending as they pulled away from the shore that he and Aunt Jochebed were fugitives, escaping from a ruthless band of Tehenu, heaved a comically huge sigh of relief and said:

"We're safe."

Jochebed, quite unconscious that the sharp eyes of Uni were watching them from the bushes, smiled at him briefly.

"Will Uncle Amram be expecting us?" Moses asked.

Jochebed shook her head.

"Good," Moses said wisely. "That will be more fun."

The boy settled back in his place. On the bank behind them, the roofs and walls of the palaces gleamed bright amid the green of the avenues and the clumps of palms and acacias and tamarisks; and around them the river was alive with traffic, great merchant ships, coloured sails bellying out in the northern breeze, and painted war galleys of the Pharaoh, their oar blades sparkling in the sun, and barges and tiny boats, like their own, and pleasure vessels and fishing craft and skiffs of the country folk bearing their produce to market.

Moses drank it in, staring at the war galleys, listening with appreciative ears to the hoarse curses of the bargees and the

pleasurable suggestions that the sailors called to Jochebed as they passed. There were small boys, too, on some of the vessels, little naked rascals, active as eels, who held their fingers to their noses at him and dived into the water to come up spitting and shouting insults at him.

But Moses paid no attention. A prince of Egypt, he felt, wouldn't pay any attention. And so they came to Memphis and slipped in through the tangle of craft and brought their boat to one of the quays and tied it there. Moses stepped out. His eyes were round. For here was a world very different from the world of the court and the palace. Here were goods piled in heaps and smells strong enough to walk by themselves and push you out of the way, and oaths and obscenities which Moses tucked away in his active mind for future experimentation, and strangers from every land. It was like seeing the frescoes and the painted bas-reliefs in his grandfather's palace and in the temples come to life. You could pick them out—the grinning Nubians from beyond the First Cataract, black skins glistening like polished ebony; the curled and bearded ancients of Cyprus; the predatory merchants from Assyria; and over there, a knot of greasy Kheta and a group of tall, fair-haired men from the lands back of the North Wind; all mingled, all chattering and shouting and cursing. In another direction a fight had started, knives flashing wickedly in the sun.

Moses would have liked to linger. But Jochebed hurried him away and into the narrow, twisted streets of Memphis, and Moses forgot the wharves. For here were strangenesses as strange as the river and the docks—mud-walled houses with but a single room and shops open to the street, and a stench which his sniffing nose told him pleasurably was different from the smells of the docks, and swarms of naked children tumbling amongst the snarling, lean-ribbed dogs, squabbling and fighting and yelling, all in inextricable confusion. And then, as if he were reliving a day he had lived before, they came into a wider street and went along it and turned in at a shop halfway up. At the back of it a frail, bent-shouldered old man got up and looked at them for a moment as if he didn't believe what he saw and then came forward, saying: "Jochebed!" Moses looked at him, remembering him. As had always happened, the man put his hand on Moses' head, and he could feel the fingers trembling and said:

"The peace of the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob be on you, my son."

Moses did not mind. From the first time that, all eyes and wonder, he had come to this place he had felt a strange attraction

towards this frail old man with the iron-grey beard and the sad, deep-set eyes. There was something about him which seemed to communicate itself to Moses, to make him forget his petulance and self-will, to bid him be at peace and quiet. He looked up and answered, the Hebrew words coming to his lips as from a remembered dream:

"The peace of Yahweh be with you, Uncle Amram."

Amram smiled across at Jochebed and, with a pressure of his fingers, released Moses. The boy glanced round at the shop, remembering the strips of gold and silver, the tiny hammers and picks and saws, the clutter of precious stones, red carnelian and banded agates and green emeralds and blue amethysts. He would have liked to finger them. But at this moment a boy walked into the shop. Jochebed exclaimed, "Aaron!" and went over to embrace him. Moses watched them. He did not care particularly for this lanky, serious-faced son of his nurse. On his side Aaron, as Jochebed kissed him, was returning the latent hostility. He knew that Moses was his brother and he knew, too, the necessity for absolute secrecy. But no boy of ten can be expected to have much feeling for a brother whom he seldom sees and who, to his thinking, puts on airs. Besides, Jochebed's preference for Moses didn't make for amity. So, when Jochebed brought him over, he greeted Moses coolly and off-handedly and Moses put up his nose and said: "Hello, Aaron." Jochebed was uneasily aware of the undercurrent between them. There was nothing, however, that she could do about it; nor was it safe to let the two stay together. She said:

"Run along now, Aaron. Nathan will take you for a walk."

Aaron turned and walked away.

"Be sure and get back before I leave," Jochebed called after him.

Aaron did not answer. His mother sighed. Amram looked from her to his elder son and his eyes had a deeper sadness in them. All he said, however, was:

"Come inside."

So they left the shop and passed into the courtyard with the fig tree and the linnet hanging in the cage, just as Moses remembered it, and came into the room that opened on it. An old hag—she was Keziah—grinning a toothless grin, scurried around and dusted off seats for them. Uncle Amram talked to him gravely for a little while, asking him questions about his studies and about his swimming and his shooting and his friend Sinuhe, and about what he thought of the gods of Egypt. Moses answered him just as gravely and Jochebed watched the two of them, her husband so serious and gentle and her son so different from

the spoiled boy of the palace. But after a while Moses began to get restless. So Amram let him go. Keziah brought him seed cakes and got out his special box of toys for him, a tattered roll or two and some battered soldiers of clay and a few blocks and a war galley that moved its paddles when you pulled a string; toys which, for some reason, Moses valued more than all his elaborate possessions at the palace. Soon he was busy and contented. Without being conscious of it peace had enfolded him. In this house, which seemed so tiny to him after the palace, he always found something the palace lacked, the sense of home. He was quite unconscious, too, of how both Amram and Jochebed were watching him. After a few moments Amram said:

"It's been four months, Jochebed."

"I know. But it's hard to get away. For one thing we've been at Tanis. Before that we were at Thebes. Even when we're at Memphis I have to be very careful. I have to be quite certain that the Princess is away for the day."

"And you are certain?"

There was an almost imperceptible lift to Jochebed's shoulders. "Prince Merneptah," she said.

"The wanton," Amram said deeply. "To think that my son——"

"Careful, Amram. Not too loud."

Amram lowered his voice. "Did I not believe that Yahweh may have some great work in mind for him I would speak out, Jochebed. My son in that abode of harlots, that stink of iniquity which is the court of Egypt. My son, brought up as a Prince of Egypt, whilst our people labour under the lash. Perhaps I ought to speak out."

Jochebed sighed. She had been over this argument so many times.

"It was the only practical thing to do, Amram," she reminded him patiently.

"We could have had faith in Yahweh. We could have faith in Him now."

Jochebed thought privately, as she had often thought before, that it was foolish to depend on Yahweh. Yahweh did nothing. Look at her own sister's son. Look at the rest of the Hebrews. But she was much too wise to mention this to her husband. Her touch on his arm was gentle.

"Are we to undo all our work of the past seven years?" she asked. "Besides," she went on, taking a weapon from Amram's own armoury, "how do we know, Amram, that this is not all part of the will of Yahweh?"

Amram considered it. "It may be so," he agreed. "And yet," he went on, turning to his wife, his voice intense, "when I go amongst our people, Jochebed . . . when I see how the Pharaoh is permitted to oppress them . . . I am but two weeks back from Goshen. I saw them all, Jochebed, our kinsfolk and our friends: Amrasi and Balak and Koher and the rest. Nun, the physician." Amram looked at his sandals. "Yes, I saw Nun, the physician, too. He said nothing, Jochebed. But"—he turned back to his wife—"I could feel him smiling at me. I could hear him saying in his mind; 'There goes Amram, a Levite of the Levites; Amram, who does not toil under the lash; Amram, who, thanks to his son . . .'"

"Amram! He wouldn't tell!"

Amram shook his head, a thought sadly and a thought bitterly.

"Don't be afraid, wife. Neither Nun, nor any of the few who really know, will betray us—not to the Egyptians, at least."

Jochebed sat back, believing that, since her husband had now unburdened himself of his feelings, he would quiet down and become reasonable. But, to her surprise, Amram began again suddenly.

"Yet when I see them—our kinsfolk and our friends—and think how you and I, yes, and Miriam and Aaron, too, sleep soft in Memphis I smell in my own nostrils." He paused. "By Yahweh," he burst out fiercely, "sooner far would I have my back bared to the lash. Aye, and yours, too. I would not feel then that I was betraying my own people."

Jochebed began to be worried a little. It was not like Amram to keep on at such length. She sat up.

"But you're not!" she exclaimed. "Do you not go to Goshen at the risk of your own life? Do you not preach to them of Yahweh?"

"How can I preach to them of Yahweh when I do not suffer with them? How can I speak to them of a 'Deliverer' when I—I and my family—dwell in comfort?"

Jochebed was getting really alarmed. Comprehension was beginning to come to her that this last visit to Goshen had disturbed her husband deeply. And who knew what went on in the mind of an impractical visionary such as her husband was? She said:

"Moses is a Prince of Egypt. There is nothing that we can do about that now."

"Is there not?" Amram got abruptly to his feet. He turned to stare at his wife. "I could speak out, Jochebed. I could tell the Pharaoh who Moses really is."

Her breath caught in her throat. She got to her feet slowly, carefully.

"Amram, you—you wouldn't!"

"Why not, if it be Yahweh's will?"

"But you would destroy him—yourself—myself—all of us!"

"What matters that, if it be the will of Yahweh?"

"But Moses, our son——"

"Better for him, too. Better for him than that he should be brought up to worship the false, the vile gods of Egypt. And then, I could preach to our people, Jochebed. They are turning away from Yahweh, Jochebed. They are turning to the gods of Egypt. But then—ah, then, I could preach to them of Yahweh. I, suffering myself as they suffer, could lead them back to Yahweh. I could speak to them of His promises. I could make them believe in a 'Deliverer' in the days to come. Can you not see, Jochebed? Aye, I must speak out. It is Yahweh's will. Aye, I will speak out."

There was the light of fanaticism blazing in his eyes. So this was what he had been brooding over in the long nights since Goshen! She could not think, could not plan. But she must! Or else this peril, this danger from Amram himself, of which, considering and preparing, as she had thought, for every possible danger, she had never even dreamed, would overwhelm, would annihilate them all. She cast about her wildly, desperately. She saw an argument. She seized on it.

"But what if Moses, our son, be the 'Deliverer'?" she cried. "What if he be Yahweh's instrument to free our people?"

He stared at her, not comprehending.

"Think, Amram," she went on feverishly. "Think. He will be a Prince of Egypt when he grows up. As a Prince of Egypt he will have power. What if Yahweh were to use that power to free our people?"

To her inexpressible relief she saw the light in his eyes begin to waver, to yield to a look of reflection. She hastened to press the advantage she had gained.

"And who but Yahweh could have made him a Prince of Egypt?" she hurried on. "Think, Amram. Were we not saved, past hope, on that terrible night, the night of the terror? Remember, he was born on the night of the terror. May there not be some meaning in that? And who else but Yahweh could have made me the friend of the Princess Bint-Anath, a woman childless and yet starved for a child, or have put it into her mind to adopt our son, a Hebrew? Surely, in all that moved the Purpose of Yahweh,"

The familiar look of brooding, withdrawn speculation was back on his face. He sat down slowly. Jochebed said:

"Have you not told me, time and time again, that His ways are mysterious ways? What if this be His way, Amram?"

"It might be so," he muttered. "Yes, it might be so."

"Our son," she suggested eagerly, leaning over him, "our son—the—the 'Deliverer,' Amram."

"Yes, it might be," he murmured to himself. "It might be His purpose. Yahweh—yes, I must have faith in Yahweh."

Her knees were as weak as water. She sat down carefully and allowed herself a long exhalation of her breath. The danger was past. She had won. But there was no triumph in Jochebed's strong, square face. Her glance lingered on her husband, realizing again his vagueness, his impracticability, his gentleness, his absorption in abstractions, all so curiously balanced and yet, in a way, completed by his fierce and fanatic devotion to Yahweh.

But what she hadn't quite realized, she told herself as she watched his withdrawn, brooding face, was that the long days and nights of loneliness had increased his absorption in Yahweh and in His people, the Hebrews. It was absurd, for instance, for Amram to make those dangerous journeys to Goshen. What good, what practical good, could they do? But there—about Yahweh and service to Him it was no use to talk to Amram. She must, however, get him out of his brooding. That, if continued, might be dangerous for Moses. She put her hand on his knee.

"Now tell me about Aaron," she said.

It was time to go. Moses was sorry. He was very still when he was on his knees and Uncle Amram was on his knees, praying to Yahweh, little dreaming that much later in his life scenes such as these would come back to his memory. He listened quietly as Amram blessed him. Going through the streets and across the docks and down the river with the sun low over the western cliffs and the shadows of the boats long on the river and the villas and palms along the shore quiet in the late afternoon, the colour and interest seemed to have gone out of things. Returning to the palace, too, brought back the recollection of the morning and his disappointment about the boat ride and the agony of his realization about his mother and Uncle Merneptah. Aunt Jochebed was quiet, too. Moses did not know that she was worrying about Aaron and the sulkiness in his face when they had said good-bye, something which had made her realize how far she was out of touch with her elder son.

But the boy sensed his nurse's mood. In silence they entered

the cove, and tied up the boat and started up the twisting path towards the palace, its roof calm and stately amongst the trees. As they came round the last cluster of palms the sun, Moses noticed, was almost down to the rim of the western cliffs. He heard Jochebed gasp and turned from the sun to look. There, at the postern gate, the Princess, his mother, was waiting and behind her was the grinning face of Uni, the steward. Moses started towards her and then, remembering the morning, stopped. The Princess came forward a step or two. Moses could feel the tautness, the tenseness in the air. He shrank together, knowing that something ugly was going to happen.

"Where have you been?" Bint-Anath demanded.

Moses knew without looking that Aunt Jochebed's lips were pressed together tightly. An ugly flush stained his mother's face.

"It's no use lying," the Princess said harshly. "Miriam said you'd gone fishing. But Uni here watched you. You didn't go fishing. You went up toward Memphis. Where did you go in Memphis?"

Jochebed stood silent. The Princess stamped her foot.

"Answer, you Hebrew slut. Or do I have to have the hide off you?"

"Be careful," said Jochebed slowly. "The boy is here."

"That's not answering my question." Moses could feel a deadly coldness in his mother. It made him shudder. "Listen you," she went on very quietly, "I'm going to have it out of you one way or another. Make up your mind. Tell now, quietly. Else, Uni here will take you to the torturer's room. Make up your mind."

Aunt Jochebed wasn't going to tell. Moses didn't know why he knew. But he knew it just as certainly as he knew that the woman he believed to be his mother meant what she said. And he had seen torture, he and Sinuhe, watching it with the curious, amoral eyes of a boy. To think of Aunt Jochebed under the torturer's hands, however, was different. Why, they'd strip her, lash her, hang her up, burn her with red-hot irons. The picture wasn't to be borne. Aunt Jochebed! With a catch in his breath, Moses left Aunt Jochebed and ran to the Princess.

"Don't, Mother," he cried. "I'll tell you. We were up at Uncle Amram's, Mother. Up in Memphis."

"So!" the Princess said. She expelled a long breath and her eyes were filled with a curious light of triumph as she looked at Jochebed. "You won't tell me. But my son"—her hand reached for Moses and drew him to her—"my son tells me. Why did you go up to Memphis? Who gave you permission."

The sun was halfway down behind the western cliffs. Jochebed's calm was broken. Moses had never seen her so unsure of herself, so uncertain. He felt himself shivering.

"There was nothing said," she began to stammer. "Nothing definite . . ."

"But you knew, you slut. You knew! Else why did you go in secret? You knew what was agreed."

"Ye-es."

"So you've broken your side of the bargain. *Uncle Amram*, indeed. My son"—she looked down at Moses, sweeping him with a glance—"dressed like a peasant, trailing through the dirt of Memphis. My son, a Prince of Egypt, cheek by jowl with filthy Hebrews . . ."

"Be careful, Princess," Jochebed interrupted. "After all, Moses . . ."

"Prince Aahmose to you," the Princess interrupted curtly in her turn. "Who would believe you now, anyway? For that matter, by the ram's horns of Amon, what's to prevent me making a clean sweep of you—Amram, Aaron, all of you. The dead are silent, you know."

The sun was completely down. Already the swift Egyptian dusk was falling in purple-tinted shadows over the palace and the palms and the river. It was quiet, peaceful, except for the ugly feelings around him. His head was whirling. He could feel that Aunt Jochebed was frightened. "Hebrew!" Why, that meant—and Uncle Amram, too. But his mind was filled abruptly with something else. "Dead." He had seen more than one slave put to death and had thought no more of it than of watching a beef got ready for market. But Aunt Jochebed—dead.

"No, Mother, no!" he cried in a high, shrill voice, clutching at the Princess. "Please, Mother. Don't kill Aunt Jochebed."

The Princess glanced down at him. There was a curious smile on her lips, a smile which, though one could scarcely see it in the dusk, was savouring the final triumph of which her mind had suddenly perceived the possibility. As she had recognized earlier in the day, there had been, for these past seven years, a battle between her and Jochebed for the possession of this child; and the Princess had been acute enough to realize that part of Moses was still closely knit, in spite of all that she could do, to the woman he believed to be his nurse. Now, however, thanks to Jochebed's mistake, she saw at last a way to achieve her object. But she must be careful. To kill Jochebed, she perceived with clarity, would be to set her up as a martyr in Moses' mind, a picture which he would never quite forget. It

would also erect a barrier between Moses and herself. Dead, Jochebed would always own a part of Moses. But, left alive . . .

She clasped Moses close to her, protectively, affectionately, realizing with a faint sense of unease and surprise that this child whom she had adopted, in part, at least, as a whim, had now become, somewhere in the long struggle, one of the most important things in her life.

"No, I won't put Jochebed to death, son," she said. "No, not even though she knows herself that she merits it. I will be kind to her, since you ask it, my son."

Jochebed knew what was happening. Yet there was nothing she could do. Miriam, Aaron, Amram—Moses himself. No, there was nothing she dared do. Her lips were tied. Life had taken on for her the unreal reality of a nightmare in which there is nothing which the dreamer can do to check the inevitable sweep of events.

"I'll take you in now, dear," the Princess said to Moses. "Your evening meal is waiting."

She turned and saw Uni standing there. Equally with Jochebed she had forgotten him. She wondered swiftly what he might or might not have inferred. Better be safe.

"Oh yes," she said to him sweetly. "I want to thank you, Uni. Come to my room, will you, shortly?"

Uni bowed, grinning all over his face in the darkness.

CHAPTER VIII

LATER that night Moses sat cross-legged on his couch. His boyish face was serious as he listened to the Princess. She was, indeed, very much the Princess, tonight. From her gown of blue, embroidered with a pattern of flashing silver leaves and shaped to her beautifully modelled body like the sheltering wings of a bird, a delicate but penetrating perfume drifted through the room. The wig on her head was bound with a golden fillet and under it her face was clear and cold and proud, her brows sharply defined, her eyes skilfully darkened and lengthened with kohl, her lips bright with vermillion. To Moses, as he looked at her, she was the most beautiful and gracious woman in the world. It was flattering, too, to have her talk so seriously to him, just as if he were grown up. Yet there was a reservation in his mind, a reservation which, though the Princess sensed it, she could not understand, since she did not know about the morning. She thought that it was merely because of Jochebed.

"So you see, my son," she was saying, persuasively. "I must take some action about Jochebed. Were it to come to the ears of your grandfather, the Pharaoh, he would insist that she be put to death. It is only I, in fact, who have protected her and her family all these years. You know now that she is a Hebrew. You are old enough also to know that all the Hebrews in Egypt are the slaves of the Pharaoh, the lowest of slaves. But I was fond of Jochebed. Without the Pharaoh's knowing it, I saved her and her family. Only, as you can see, for fear that the Pharaoh might hear of it, she and Miriam were to refrain from Memphis. The less talk the better. You can understand the wisdom of that, can't you?"

Moses nodded gravely.

"Well, now that this has happened, I must send her away. Otherwise, people might talk and then it might come to the ears of the Pharaoh. The sooner she's forgotten around the palace the better for her. Can you understand that?"

Moses nodded again, hesitantly, remembering with a tiny shudder the look on his mother's face when she had met them that evening. It had been an ugly look, one which, Moses realized instinctively, had been deadly and evil.

"But you won't punish her?" he wanted to know.

The Princess smiled at him tenderly. "Of course not. I'll have to send her away. But that is all." She paused. It might be unwise. But—she had to know. "You won't miss her too much, will you?"

Moses said nothing.

"Not with me here, surely."

Moses looked up at her. She was gracious and beautiful. The boy could not help but feel the fascination of her. And he loved her so much. But there was still the morning—and Uncle Merneptah. He looked away.

"You forgot the boat ride," he said.

Bint-Anath reflected swiftly. It was a nuisance. The court was always a constant swirl of intriguing currents and she knew that the price of her influence with the Pharaoh was eternal vigilance. Yet this boat ride had evidently meant a lot to the boy and with this affair of Jochebed on top of it. . . . Besides, it would be as well to give him a complete change of scene. Let variety and novelty blot out any hankering after Jochebed. No use stopping at halfway measures.

All this had passed through her mind rapidly. She got up and came over to sit on the couch beside her adopted son and put a soft, sweet-scented arm around him.

"I'm so very sorry, darling," she said. "Business came up

—important business. I couldn't put it off. Will you forgive me?"

It was healing to Moses' hurt egotism to have his mother pleading with him. But he wasn't going to yield too rapidly. His body remained stiff and obstinate against the pressure of her arm.

"Do you know what I've planned instead of the boat ride?" Bint-Anath asked. "A boat trip to the villa at On. Won't that be nicer?"

"Ye—es."

"Sinuhe can come, too. A week there—hunting, fishing, swimming. You'll like that, won't you?"

It surprised her that the boy's body was still unyielding. She wondered what could be the matter. Surely, it couldn't be just the boat ride. Nor could it be, surely, the driving out of Jochebed. Moses' next words gave her the clue.

"I suppose Uncle Merneptah will be along?" he blurted out.

Why, he was jealous of Merneptah! The Princess, who had the adult's complacent view of children's perceptions so that she had no idea of how accurately Moses had interpreted the scene between herself and Merneptah the day before, wanted to laugh. But she was wise enough to restrain herself. Once again she thought swiftly. The Princess, ever since the death of Prince Dedi, and even before that, had never put any reins on her liking for pleasure. Consequently she was by no means through with Merneptah. But if the boy was jealous of him—absurd though that was for a boy of seven—still in order to reconcile him completely to herself—and besides On wasn't far from Memphis—and besides, if Merneptah didn't like it, she thought suddenly and abruptly, realizing again with that curious sense of unease how important the complete possession of Moses had become to her—to the jackals of Anubis with Merneptah.

"No," she said, "Merneptah won't come."

"Oh, Mother!" Moses exclaimed. He twisted round and flung his arms about her, hugging her. Bint-Anath did not know it, but by her answer she had replied to the deeper question in Moses' mind, since the boy recognized intuitively that she had chosen between him and Merneptah; and, even though the realization of the morning had left its wound, he was now ready to forgive his mother. He was even ready in his emotion to give the lie to what he really knew about her, although this did not by any means include forgiveness of Merneptah. "It will be wonderful," he sighed, relaxing his embrace. "Just wonderful."

The Princess disengaged herself, remembering that her guests would be awaiting her. But she was not quite ready to leave.

She regarded Moses soberly, her mind travelling back to that day, seven years ago, when she had faced Jochebed across the cradle of this boy. Her motives at that time might have been somewhat casual and indefinite. They were so no longer. In the seven years, somehow this child had become as dear to her—no, more dear—than any real son could be. Jochebed had always fought her for possession of him. Well, Jochebed was being eliminated. Very well. But there was something more to do. Since this boy was now hers and since he had become so important that she would even put off Merneptah for him, it was time to start to eliminate every trace of the influence of Jochebed on him, every trace of anything which might be Hebrew in him. She would do so, she decided, just as effectively as, an hour before, she had had the unsuspecting but suddenly amazed and terrified Uni completely removed from the problem. Yes, she told herself while Moses stared up at her adoringly, he should become Egyptian, wholly Egyptian, from the soles of his feet to the hair of his head. And he should become hers, wholly hers. Besides, who knew what chances might open? Khamwese, the favourite son of the Pharaoh, who was High Priest of Ptah and the most famous of the famed magicians of Egypt, was sickly. Now, if he were to die—a woman was hampered by her sex—but this boy, accepted as her son and as the grandson of the Pharaoh—and who stepped into the throne depended on who had the power—yes, stranger things had happened in Egypt. More than pleasure, more than anything else, this daughter of the Pharaoh loved power. Her nostrils flared as she envisaged the possibilities if Moses grew up strong and princely. She dropped down by the boy again.

"Listen, Moses," she said, looking deep into his eyes. "You realize that you're not an ordinary boy, don't you? That you're the grandson of the greatest Pharaoh Egypt has ever had?"

The boy nodded, his eyes wide.

"A Prince of Egypt," she continued. "You must learn to be worthy of that, my son. A prince must know how to govern, how to lead armies, how to set his foot on the necks of his inferiors and yet decide justice between them."

"Yes, Mother."

"We've been too irregular about your education so far. It's my fault. I haven't thought about it enough. But we'll be serious about it now. There's Ipuwer, High Priest of Ra at On," the Princess went on, reflectively. "We'll consult him. He knows all the secret, ancient lore of Egypt. It will be hard work, son."

She had chosen the right approach. There was an eager light in Moses' eyes as he looked up at her.

"I'll work, Mother. I'll work hard."

Bint-Anath smiled at him. "I know you will, Moses. But I want you to do something else, too. I want you to remember, always, that you are a prince. Remember that you are born to rule. Do not be too familiar with the common people. You are of different clay than they. Use them and use slaves as they should be used, as tools and instruments to further your will." She paused, wondering how far to go. "That is the way, too," she continued slowly, "in which you must regard the Hebrews. Yes, my son, in spite of Jochebed, the Hebrews, too, are slaves, less than nothing, less than the dust under our feet. Because of Jochebed it may be hard for you to think of them in that way. But you must—if you are to be a true Prince of Egypt. You must never associate with them in any way, except as one associates with slaves. Are you like-minded with me in that, my son?"

"Ye—es," Moses announced, somewhat doubtfully.

The Princess was content not to press the point. The seed had been planted. Give it time to germinate and grow. She rose from the couch, well pleased with herself. Those ladies who gossiped that Moses was her own son—well, as a result of tonight's work they might be much closer to the real truth than they knew.

It was still later that evening, almost midnight, in fact, when Jochebed came in. The room was quite dark. Shielding the flame of the candle which she carried from the draft of the opened shutters she walked over and looked down at her son. He was lying, sprawled on his back, one arm under his head, his lips parted. Jochebed could not know that he had lain awake for some time after the Princess had left to puzzle over the events of the day, forming his own opinion of them and coming finally to a solemn resolve to be grown-up and worthy of the trust the woman he believed to be his mother reposed in him and to block from his mind the thoughts of the morning. But she could see that his face was flushed. Was he a little feverish? she asked herself anxiously, bending closer and immediately wondering with a stab of anguish who would look after him if he ever fell sick again as he had two years before, tossing in delirium while she watched over him night after night, day after day.

It didn't bear thinking about. That something disastrous would come out of the meeting with the Princess, Jochebed had known as soon as she had seen her. She hadn't guessed, however,

that it would take quite this form. People would say, in fact, that the Princess had been lenient with her.

But one woman cannot live as closely to another as Jochebed had lived with Bint-Anath and not possess a keen intuition of her inmost purposes and thoughts. It was perfectly clear to Jochebed that in the battle for Moses the Princess had triumphed and that the grace she had shown was motivated, not by kindness, but by the knowledge that cruelty would inevitably repel the child and weaken her hold over him. There was also in Bint-Anath's mind, so Jochebed surmised, the fear that in some way or another the violence of death might reach the Pharaoh's ears and recall to his mind the circumstances of that adoption of seven years before. The Pharaoh could be disconcertingly acute on occasion. As for her own implied threat, the threat of making public that Moses was her son and a Hebrew, she could not use it. A woman does not pull down a house if she knows it will destroy her children as well as herself.

At this price, therefore, Jochebed reflected sadly, her life and that of her family was spared. They had grace to live on, so it had been agreed, provided they left Memphis and lost themselves and never, in any way communicated or tried to communicate with Moses. In return for that grace she was now to look her last on her son. If only, she thought desperately, staring at him as if to try to fix the picture of him on her mind indelibly, he didn't entirely forget her. If only the goodness in him was not entirely corrupted.

But what had to be done, had to be done. Yet before she left him lying there—the covers off him—Jochebed put the candle on the table, bent over, and carefully, tenderly, began to draw up the coverlet. Moses awoke. He sat up abruptly.

"Aunt Jochebed!" he exclaimed.

"Hush," she said, putting her finger to her lips and looking around her. "Hush!"

Moses lowered his voice. "Why are you here? It isn't morning, is it?"

"No," Jochebed whispered. "I just came for a last look at you. Miriam and I are leaving—right away."

"Oh!" Moses said, memory returning. He thought a moment, then looked up at her. "You're a Hebrew, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"And Uncle Amram, too?"

"Yes."

"I'm glad you've come," Moses said. "I was thinking about that too. I know that the Hebrews are slaves. Mother says they're the lowest slaves, not fit for an Egyptian to—to"—he couldn't

remember the word—"to go around with. But I wanted to tell you that I don't care if you are a Hebrew—or Uncle Amram, either. I like you."

She couldn't bear it. "Moses!" she exclaimed with a sob, sinking down on the couch and gathering him in her arms. "Moses, my—my loved one."

Moses let her embrace him a moment. Then he wriggled away a little.

"That's what I wanted to tell you," he said. "I thought it all out. It doesn't matter if the Hebrews are slaves. You're different—you and Uncle Amram. You're nice."

"You won't forget us?"

"No. I'll come and see you."

"I'm afraid you won't be able to do that, dear."

"Of course I will. Why not?"

She didn't want to tell him about leaving Memphis. "Your—your mother," she said in a low voice. "She won't like it."

He knew at once, without arguing, that this was true. His face fell. "Well, I'll come when I'm grown-up," he muttered.

His mother paused. She must be very careful, she remembered, even in her anguish, to say nothing, to do nothing which could hurt her son, or raise questions in his mind. She must think of his future. Yes, even though she did not have the slightest idea as to what that future might be, she must do nothing which might injure it or leave a question or a hurt with him. She said carefully:

"You won't forget Yahweh, either, will you?"

"No—o."

"You'll say your prayers to Him every night, the way I've taught you, even when I'm not here, and ask Him to make you wise and good, won't you? He's Uncle Amram's God, you know."

"Ye—es." Moses was evidently dubious. Yahweh, to him, was an old man with a floating beard who lived in the sky and was vaguely akin to, but somehow much more powerful than, those other old men Aunt Jochebed and Uncle Amram were always talking about—Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. He didn't really feel much interest in any of them. Amon-Ra was definitely more interesting. He yawned. "I won't forget you, anyway," he promised.

"And the Hebrews—all the Hebrews—promise me"—she bent closer to him in her intensity—"they're people like yourself. Promise me you won't let them make you despise them as they do."

Moses was not quite sure just what she meant. But, if it would

please Aunt Jochebed—even if to his mother, the Princess, the Hebrews were the lowest of the low—anyway he could keep it to himself.

"I promise," he said, yawning again. "Really promise."

She had done what she could. It was time to go. But one couldn't go. There was so much to say and no words to say it with. She released him and got up abruptly.

"Time for my little man to go back to sleep now," she said briskly. "Kiss me good night."

He kissed her. Just as if she weren't putting him to bed for the very last time, she laid him down and covered him up. He was very still, watching her with bright eyes. In one last uncontrollable impulse she bent down and kissed him again, hard. Something of her desperate mood was communicated to him. The realization came to him that she was really leaving him, and, though he could not as yet comprehend just how great a loss that would be, he clung to her.

"God bless you," she whispered, her voice breaking.

"Don't go," he begged.

"I must. May Yahweh watch over you. Good-bye, my—my son."

Moses didn't notice the last word. He was remembering Aunt Jochebed putting him to bed; Aunt Jochebed feeding him; Aunt Jochebed curing him when he ran to her with a cut finger or a bumped head.

"Don't go," he repeated.

"Say 'good-bye.'"

There was finality in her tone and the boy recognized it. He relaxed his grip.

"Good-bye, Aunt Jochebed."

CHAPTER IX

It is one of the drawbacks of absolute power that one's work is never done. At this late hour while Moses slept and while Jochebed and Miriam went out from the great entrance of Bint-Anath's palace into the darkness on their dreary way up to Memphis, a light still burned in the Pharaoh's library; and from behind his desk of ebony inlaid with gold Rameses stared at his two viziers, his fingers drumming impatiently on the arm of his golden chair.

"But what has happened to the possessions of the Hebrews?" he demanded.

"That was seven years ago, Majesty," Intef pointed out and nodded towards the papyrus rolls with which the table was littered. "It is all set down there."

"Accounts! Statements!" The Pharaoh, who was extremely weary—an audience this morning, the embassy from Kush and the envoy of the Kheta this afternoon, Bint-Anath's banquet this evening, and a hundred other things in between—flicked the rolls away irritably. "A man can make figures say whatever he likes."

"It pains me to tell you, O Ruler-of-the-Two-Lands," Intef said respectfully. "But your treasury is once more empty. In these past two years, Majesty, you have far exceeded your own programme of building. There is not a city in Egypt in which some temples has not been built, in which new obelisks and new statues have not been set up. Your expenditures of materials and labour have outrun resources. Not even Egypt, O-Horus-on-Earth, can match the outpouring."

"My plans do not brook interruption."

"Your treasury is empty," Intef repeated stubbornly.

Rameses thought a moment, drumming with the fingers of his right hand on the arm of his chair. He said:

"Increase the taxes."

"Already, O He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken, the tax gatherers sweep up the very chaff from the threshing floors."

The Pharaoh smacked the palm of his hand down on the table. "The tribute, then. Increase the tribute from Canaan and from Syria and from Kush."

"If it is your will, O Chosen-of-Amon. There may be revolt. Nor does such a measure solve the problem of labourers."

Rameses thought a moment longer. Then a slow smile curved his lips. He sat up. "In that case," he observed reasonably, "there is but one source left. The Hebrews."

Intef's face flushed and then grew pale. Ebana came to life.

"A brilliant thought, O Shepherd-of-Thy-People," he exclaimed effusively. "A divine inspiration."

"But the Hebrews can do no more," Intef protested. "Already they labour four weeks in every year on the buildings of the Pharaoh. Already one-fourth of all they raise in Goshen is taken from them."

"Let it be a half. And let them all—men and women both—be driven out to labour on my buildings for two months in every year."

"But . . ."

The Pharaoh rose. "What you do not understand," he said coldly, "is that my building must go forward. You seem to think,

Intef, that I have built enough. I tell you that what I have done is as nothing to what I will do. I have raised obelisks and temples. Others shall be raised up to my glory. I have built Tanis. I shall build other cities. Yes, at some time, I tell you, I shall build a city at Avaris and a wall and forts from it along my eastern border so that never again shall Egypt, as in the days of the Hyksos, be invaded from Asia. And you—you seem to think that I should have some thought for the comfort of those dogs of aliens, the Hebrews—as if they, the idle dogs, are as aught in comparison to Egypt and her welfare and her glory. Which are you, Intef, an Egyptian or a Hebrew?"

"I only wished to suggest, Majesty . . ."

"Let there be no more words. I have spoken."

Intef knew that it was of no use to plead further—even though he knew that the Pharaoh's new command would make it almost impossible for the Hebrews to win the most miserable of livings for themselves and would push them down still further into degradation. He bowed his head. The Pharaoh sat down again.

"And tell your overseers to use the whip, Intef," he added. "Get some work out of the dogs. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Majesty."

"Very well. You may go."

He did not watch his viziers leave. That's settled, he thought, and, leaning back, locked his hands behind his head and stretched until the bones cracked. By Osiris, he was weary, he told himself, relaxing. He thought a moment of his harem. There was a new concubine which his Governor of Sais had sent him, a white-skinned virgin of the Peoples of the North. But he was weary.

Ten years ago, or even five, the Pharaoh realized, he would not have thought of weariness and that white-skinned virgin in the same breath. But no, he was weary. Yes, at fifty-three—there was a bitter curve to his lips—when one was by oneself, one could admit it. He took up a roll from the table and then tossed it petulantly on the floor. He got up. He wandered about the room, touching this, disturbing that. He noticed the portrait bust of Bint-Anath and paused to study it a moment, reflecting on the fact, lately brought to his attention, that his daughter and Merneptah were having an affair. A somewhat cynical smile appeared on his lips. She was a wanton, this daughter of his, but an attractive wanton. Which made all the difference. Besides she was like himself. When she wanted anything, she got it.

This reflection in turn reminded him of Moses. A slight frown creased the Pharaoh's brow as he turned from the statue and began to pace slowly up and down the room. He'd kept an eye

on the youngster. A handsome brat—almost Syrian-looking. Now, which of Bint-Anath's women friends of seven years ago had been a Syrian—or part Syrian?

Rameses couldn't remember. No, he resolved, some time when it came to his mind and the opportunity was right, he'd ask his daughter who the parents of that youngster really were. Bint-Anath had outmanœuvred him when she had adopted the boy. Since then, she had always managed to slide away from the subject of Moses' parentage whenever he had remembered to approach it—which had been seldom since, indeed, he was much too busy ordinarily to bother about a trivial matter of that sort. Still Bint-Anath's secrecy was intriguing—unless the boy was really her own son as gossip had sometimes hinted.

The Pharaoh stopped where he was. He thought carefully. That Syrian look about the boy—black hair, swarthy skin, eyes that were exceptionally liquid and expressive, a bold, high-bridged nose. And Bint-Anath's mother had been a Syrian. It was possible—just possible. Women, he understood, had ways of concealing all but the final stages of pregnancy. Nor had he, seven years ago, seen very much of Bint-Anath for several months before the adoption since he himself had been travelling all over Egypt, planning his building programme and also, his campaign against the Hebrews. Hadn't there been a rumour, too, at that time, about his daughter being pregnant? Yes, it was just possible.

The Pharaoh began to walk up and down the room again. Though, why in that case she had concealed who the child was unless she was afraid that it would look so unlike Prince Dedi that there would be open scandal—red hair or something like that—and she had had an affair at about that time with that red-headed Sherden captain. Yes, that might be it. Yes, that might be it. In fact, considering Bint-Anath's passionate affection for the boy and her equally passionate insistence of seven years ago that it should be decreed that no one, not anyone, should on pain of death refer to the boy as other than her very own child, the explanation that Moses was really Bint-Anath's own illegitimate child might, quite possibly, be the true one. In which case, so the Pharaoh resolved, he wouldn't for the moment trouble her with questions. He would simply watch. Watch the affair with Merneptah, too, though that affair wouldn't last long. In his opinion, knowing Merneptah, the mutual attraction must be physical only, though he could well imagine Bint-Anath enjoying it for that reason alone.

This turn in his thoughts brought back to him the memory of his hareem—and of the girl from the Peoples of the North.

But he could not seem to develop any interest. Frowning, he turned to the floor-deep window and stepped through it. Once again, as he had done seven years before, he strolled down to the Nile. Once again he stared out at the river. There was no moon this night. The broad flood flowed by slumbrously, yet powerfully, its darkly molten surface lit here and there by flashes of phosphorescence.

The Pharaoh stared at it. He tried to reawaken within himself his sense of power, of majesty. The Nile—Egypt—Egypt—the Nile—all mine, he told himself. Menes is dead. And Khufu, who built the Great Pyramid, is dead. And all the long line of the Pharaohs is dead. But I, Rameses, live. And I, Rameses the Great, rule Egypt.

But for how long? The question seemed almost to be shouted into his ears. Rameses lifted his eyes. He looked off into the distance. In this light he could not see the mass of the pyramids. But he knew where they were. A millennium and a half ago Pharaohs, even as he, had built those mighty pyramids, Pharaohs in the flush and glory of their power. But where were they now? Who thought of them? What were they, in actuality, but names, mere names mouthed by the lips of scholars and historians, dry as dust to the taste, with no hint of the real men themselves, of the feelings which must have moved them, of the desires and hatreds which had coursed through them, of the little homely touches which divide the living from the forgotten dead. Of what avail to them that they had once ruled Egypt in majesty and glory? This was what it came to—in spite of all your building, in spite of all your victories, in spite of all your pomp and power. A living peasant, centuries hence, would be more real, more actual than himself, Rameses the Great.

The thought to a man of the Pharaoh's egotism was scarcely to be borne. He cursed and looked down at the river again. But the river, too, mocked him. That river—it had flowed by for centuries before he was born. It would flow on for millenniums after he was dead, after he was forgotten, after he was less than the mud swirled along in its stream. Was that what he was come to, he, Rameses the Great?

The Pharaoh cursed again, a curse that was almost a groan. He turned from the river. He swung round to look at the light from the room he had left, its radiance enfeebled by the immensity of the night, just as his own power would be dim against the length of time. What matter if he ruled for fifty years more. At some time he would have to die.

Die? The Pharaoh's lips were drawn back from his teeth. Die? Well, then, by Osiris, before he died, he would at least leave his

mark on Egypt. By Osiris and by Set and Amon-Ra himself, he would so impress himself on Egypt that for centuries—no, for millenniums—after he was dead—aye, for so long as that river endured, his name, at least, would be remembered. Those Hebrews, the stiff-necked curs, those Asiatic dogs, they would pay the penalty for this mortality of his. Yes, by Anubis, they would be the wheat to be ground between the nether and the upper millstones of his purpose and his power. And that white-skinned virgin—Too old, was he? By the Goat of Mendes—

At this same hour Bint-Anath faced Merneptah. His face was flushed and angry. From the moment that the Princess had informed him of her decision to go to On for a week, he had been seized by a violent attack of jealousy. Bint-Anath had been flattered at first. But by now she was becoming weary of it.

"Who is the man?" Merneptah raved for the tenth time. He stopped in front of Bint-Anath. "Who is he, I say?"

"I've told you there is no man."

"You expect me to believe that? Going down to On. Tomorrow. Telling me I can't come with you. You're meeting someone there!"

"I've told you it's an outing for Moses."

"That brat."

The Princess stopped smiling. "Will you be reasonable, Merneptah."

"Who is it? Is it Snefru?"

"No! For the thousandth time . . ."

"Then, who is it?"

"It's a big, blue-eyed Northerner," Bint-Anath said in exasperation.

"So! You admit it."

The Princess got up from the couch on which she'd been sitting. "I've told you there's no one," she said. "If you like you can come down in a day or two and see for yourself."

"And have you pull your tunic over my eyes?" Merneptah sneered. "I know you, Bint-Anath. Well, there are other women."

Bint-Anath's patience snapped. "Go to them, then," she answered coldly and, turning to the mirror, she picked up a comb and began to pass it through her hair. Merneptah stared at her, fascinated by the movements of her body, held by a devastating desire which had not, as yet, become sated. And to think of another man possessing her! On a sudden impulse he seized the Princess by the shoulder and swung her around.

"By the cow's horns of Hathor, you're not going."

Bint-Anath freed herself.

"Do you hear, you're not going."

"Really?"

"No. I won't permit you."

"How do you propose to prevent me?"

"That Hebrew woman of yours. I'll remind the Pharaoh of her. I'll ask him, yes, I'll ask him who Moses' parents are."

Bint-Anath's mind raced at lightning speed. She was extremely glad now that Jochebed was out of the palace. And by the time Merneptah got to the Pharaoh, Jochebed and her family would be out of Memphis. Yes, she'd have to see to that, get them away swiftly. As for the rest, well, she would accept the challenge. She tossed back her head.

"I give you leave," she said, smiling coldly.

"My mother will help me. My mother . . ."

"That's right. Run to your mother, little boy."

"Whore!" Merneptah cursed and struck her, and then stood, his lower jaw dropping, horrified at what he had done. Bint-Anath sank back on the couch, her hand pressed to her cheek.

"Forgive me," Merneptah began to stammer. "I didn't think. I . . ."

"Go!" the Princess said.

"I didn't mean it. I was half-mad from jealousy. Darling . . ."

The Princess reached over to the gong on the table. "Must I summon my slaves?"

Merneptah flushed. "You wouldn't dare."

"Wouldn't I?" She picked up the hammer.

Merneptah's teeth came together with a click. "Very well," he said. "But you aren't done with me yet, Bint-Anath. I tell you. . . ."

"I'm not done with you, either," the Princess interrupted, her eyes flashing. "Wherever I can, whenever I can, I'll make you sorry for this. You, a gallant of Egypt! You, not washed behind the ears yet! What I ever saw in you, you—you man of stupidity. I warn you, I'll use my influence with the Pharaoh against you."

Merneptah turned and walked stiffly to the door. At the entrance, he paused.

"My mother, the Princess Tiyy, has friends," he stated. "We shall see who has the most influence with the Pharaoh." He left the room.

In the room above the Princess' head, Moses—too young, even if he had been awake, to realize what changes had been effected

in his future by this momentous day—slept the sleep of a seven-year-old boy. In Memphis, Jochebed and Miriam hurried about the house, packing, while Amram, completely bewildered by the sudden turn in events, stood by and watched them with mazed eyes. Over in Goshen, Nun, weary of lying awake, got up from the dirt floor of his mud-brick hovel and came to the door. Above him the stars were bright spearpoints in an illimitable sky. Below them was stretched out the wide plain of Goshen, fading at the edges of vision into shadow. The trees were vague blurs. The village in the distance was a black lump. Somewhere a cow lowed and a dog barked in answer. Off in the darkness a donkey brayed, its gasping cry like the soul of humanity lost in its own emptiness.

Nun leaned against the doorway. The stillness oppressed him. So did the immensity. Back at Memphis there had been other houses near by. Back in Memphis his own house had been intimate, comforting, the slaves around him, the spacious courtyard, the room hung with priceless tapestries and rich with precious objects, with chairs and cushioned couches of gold and ivory and ebony, with jars of alabaster and diorite, with vases and statues and papyrus rolls. Here there was nothing. Behind him was a lonely room. Outside, this immensity, this emptiness. Whereas back in Memphis, the rooms of his house and moving about them, Ruth. . . .

There was a spasm of agony on Nun's face. He swore roughly, changing his position. Not that tonight. Anything, but to think about that. He cast about him hurriedly. He told himself that as an intelligent man, he should be able to force himself to go to sleep, knowing that he would need his sleep for the ditch and the hot sun tomorrow. But there were moments when intelligence broke down. Consider, for instance, his reflections about race this morning. In Memphis he had been scarcely conscious that he was a Hebrew. Yet with Intef he had drawn himself up and said:

"At the last, Intef, I find that I am a Hebrew."

Why? As an intelligent man he knew that races weren't real. People were simply people, whether they were Egyptians or Hebrews or Arabians or Nubians, animals having the same basic reactions to fear and love and pain and hate. Nor were people important. They thought they were. To each individual, not realizing that he was but a hundred-millionth part or less of an infinitesimal bubble poised on a pinpoint of time, his own sufferings and emotions were more important than the whole boundless sweep of the universe. Which was, he supposed, at once the folly and the egotism and the majesty of humanity. Yet, as Amram

was really trying to say, though from a different approach, the important thing, actually, was not the individual but the long generations of mankind, each stemming from the one before and giving way to the one which came after. Though to regard humanity itself as important when one considered the whole sweep of time, was in itself an egotism. Look at Egypt. Over two thousand years already since Menes had first united the Two Lands. And before Menes, thousands of other generations had been born, come to maturity and died. What did it matter, after all, to those first Egyptians, thousands of years ago, that the Egypt of today stood foremost in the world? The littleness of humanity. To Amram humanity was the supreme creation of God, and humanity's fate and fortune the one thing which gave meaning to the universe; though, probably, Amram would say that God himself was the whole meaning and purpose of things and that the only important thing about man was his search for the will of God and his attempt to follow that will.

Which God? Nun sneered to himself. What will? Who says which is the true God and even if you find that out who is to say what His will is? The absurdity and the egotism of it. Standing here in this immensity you could feel the littleness of man, not as Amram would have expressed it, in relation to a God, but simply in relation to the unending curve of time and the limitless reaches of space. Why think man was any more important than that cow lowing yonder or that donkey braying? Doubtless to them what happened within the limits of their experience was as important as man's own affairs to man—just as great and just as small. To make either man or God the centre of the universe was foolish. What were men but chiptossed this way and that on the billows of unending Time? So, why should he, Nun, suffer at what had happened to himself or worry about the future of his people? Yet he did suffer. Intelligence was not enough, he thought vaguely. If a man could but have faith—like Amram.

He shrugged off the thought impatiently. Faith, he reminded himself, was the mark of an intelligence which was either not capable of reaching the ultimate and logical conclusions or else, in fear and emotion, shrank away from them. Take his people and their future. Amram held out hopes of a 'Deliverer'; one who, according to the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by Yahweh in the old days, would lead the Hebrews up out of Egypt to Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey. Which was absurd. Where was such a Deliverer to come from? Not from the Hebrews. What Hebrew was there capable of overthrowing the power of Egypt and leading the Hebrews forth?

And certainly not from the Egyptians. Consider it intelligently. Amram's faith and the faith of others like him had a value. If the Hebrews were to survive as a people they must have hope. Faith in Yahweh and His promises of deliverance would give them hope and keep them a people, a race apart, in spite of the oppression. It would put into them the terrible egotism of the humble and the oppressed who can accept their very sufferings as a sign of the interest of their own peculiar God in their welfare. The human mind was, indeed, peculiar. The Egyptians attributed their prosperity and the power of their empire to the protecting hand and favour of Amon and Osiris and all their gods. Those Hebrews who believed in Yahweh justified their lowly state by the anger at them of their own God, Yahweh. How illogical humanity was.

This was, Nun recalled, apart from the point. The point was what was to happen to the Hebrews. Granted that it was not important whether they survived or not—why should it be?—what chance was there for them? None, he decided, staring off over the quiet plain, brooding under the sky. They could not resist. They could only suffer. Sooner or later they would disintegrate as a people. Sooner or later their faith in Yahweh would disappear. Sooner or later, as had happened to other races enslaved by the Egyptians, they would either be blotted out or swallowed up by Egypt. What difference would that make either to the universe or to humanity itself? Again the answer was: "None". Himself, and Amram, Ruth, his dead wife, Moses, that child saved from the terror—all of them chips floating on the sea of events. It was better to face the inevitable, better to see that there was no hope.

Nun laughed. He turned and went inside the hut. But, had Nun been able to look into the future and see that day when he and the child, Moses, would meet, he would not have laughed.

CHAPTER X

THE beetle of the days rolled up the months and the years. During those years the Hebrews laboured in Goshen, except when they were dragged from thence to toil like beasts on the grandiose monuments of the Pharaoh. During those years, too, the Pharaoh became constantly more morose and suspicious of all those about him and more and more absorbed in his mania for building. Meanwhile, Bint-Anath watched over Moses with a devotion in which a jealous affection was merged with a calculating

hope the power she might, at some time if the fates nodded upward, achieve through her adopted son. She took him with her wherever she went. She got him tutors and was delighted to find that he had an alert intelligence and an avid thirst for knowledge. By every possible means she strove to eradicate the memory and the influence of Jochebed from him and to create in him ambition and arrogance and an appetite for dominance. And then when he was fourteen, determined that he should be equipped in every way for any opportunities chance might offer, she sent him, together with Sinuhe, his boyhood friend, to the temple school of Ipuwer at On.

It was here that a new world opened for the boy. Sitting in the temple-courts under the gold-capped obelisk of Ra or wandering with Sinuhe and the other students through the quiet streets of the scholar-city, during those golden years of youth when each new fact is a new discovery, unpoisoned as yet by that sense of the feebleness of all knowledge and that certainty of the empty brevity of life which overtakes one in later life, Moses had revealed to him the ancient and jealously guarded lore of Egypt, the secrets of its amazing skill in engineering and architecture and astronomy and medicine, the long history of its gods and Pharaohs, the story of the globe and its peoples, the mystic powers of the mind whereby the priests and magicians produced their illusions so that a rope would suddenly seem to become a hissing serpent and a boy to climb up a trunk of empty space.

It is not strange that under this tutelage the boy's mind expanded or that his natural love and admiration for Egypt, his Egypt as he believed her to be, deepened and took on form and expression. And as the years went by, under Ipuwer's guidance, in the quiet temple courts, which seemed to be untouched by time, so far removed were they from the winds of crass reality, he was led to approach the riddle of the universe, to question the gods and faith of Egypt, to wonder if the invisible were, in reality, more real than the visible. He was led to speculate on the truth or falsity of the esoteric belief of the priests of Ra wherein the great gods of Egypt were, at best, merely the manifestations of one great Power, eternal and uncreate, itself begetting all things but not itself begotten, impartial and withdrawn, not caring any more for Egypt or for the Egyptians than for any race or land, itself not graven by men's hands since it was beyond man's thinking and man's being.

But Moses, though he would speculate on the possible existence of such a Power could not bring himself to belief in its actuality. To him, even in these years of youth when the alert mind is radical

and revolutionary, avid of the new and impatient with the old, such a Power seemed too remote and uncaring. Nor was he willing to admit that there were no especial gods to protect and magnify the Egypt he loved.

Sinuhe thought his speculations sheer foolishness. What did they matter, anyway? How could they, whether true or false, affect the fact that a man knew this at least—and only this—that he had one life to live and that this life, if lived properly, was good?

“Leave such arguments to the priests,” he would say to Moses. What does it matter to us whether there be one God or many? You are a Prince of Egypt. I am a noble. We are born to rule. Forget your questionings, Moses. Come with me to the taverns. Find yourself a girl. That’s what life is for.”

But Moses would shake his head, smiling. He would go to search out Ipuwer. Sitting in the quiet temple courts, while above their heads the great gold-capped obelisk of Ra was gilded by the last rays of the setting sun and to their ears stole the pellucid notes of the hymn of evening, he would argue with the old priest.

“If such a Power be the only Power and the gods of Egypt are but figments,” he would say, “why do you not proclaim the truth from the housetops? Why permit error to triumph?”

The old shaven-skulled priest would answer him by indirection. “You have seen the peasants, Moses. You have seen how they toil without profit and without hope and what little they make is taken from them by the tax gatherers whilst they themselves are beaten with rods and are subjected to the caprices of the nobles and of the Pharaoh, your grandfather. Such a people must have solace for the misery wherewith their lives are wrapped round in this world of Ra. Where are they to find solace except in their belief in Osiris and a better world to come after this one or in their own little gods? The great gods of Egypt are too far-off, too majestic for them. They marvel, it may be, at Amon and at Ra and at Ptah of Memphis. But the gods they really worship are the little gods, their beast-gods and their homely, familiar gods, gods who, so they believe, can dwell in their huts with them and go out into the fields with them so that they can pour into their ears their sufferings and their hopes, their fears and their desires, and feel that they are understood. Would it not be cruel to tell them that these little gods of theirs are false? Would it not be stupid to take this solace from them?”

“Yes, but . . .”

“Or do you think such people as the peasants, starved and ignorant, are capable of the concept of one great, impersonal Power?”

"No, but . . ."

"Yet would you therefore, because they are believed in, hold that these little gods exist and have power?"

"No," Moses would say, slowly. "But the great gods of Egypt . . ."

"Are not Amon and Ptah and jackal-headed Anubis and the rest but the little gods of the peasants, magnified a hundred or a thousandfold by time and the needs of state?"

"Then, why do you not proclaim the truth to the priests and the nobles of Egypt?"

Ipuwer would shake his head, smiling at the ruthless impatience of the young, to whom all problems are simple and painted in two colours only, white and black. "Would the nobles thank me, they who think only of wars and wealth and women and power? Consider Sinuhe, your friend. Or consider the Pharaoh, your grandfather. As for the priests—stop and think, Moses. Do we not possess one-third of Egypt, free from taxes? Do not gifts and revenues flow in to us? Have we not power in the land? Where would the priests be if belief in the great gods of Egypt were destroyed?"

"Yet, the truth . . ."

"Truth, my son, is a two-edged sword. Consider Ikhnaton, that Pharaoh whose very name is anathema for that he strove to overthrow Amon and the other gods of Egypt and to set up the worship of his Aton, as the one and only god. The main mass of humanity do not want truth, my Moses. They cherish their traditional and easy beliefs, based on emotion. They hug their prejudices. It is easier so, more comfortable than to be compelled to think and to suffer the sharp pangs of the birth of an idea. And who, my Moses, knows what truth really is? One comes as close to it as one can. One's mind is free. That is as far as a man can go."

But Moses, though feeling that there was something incorrect in this argument, would leave it and return tenaciously to the one point which was vital to him. "Yet the great gods of Egypt—" he would say stubbornly, "have we not in Egypt believed in them for centuries and millenniums? Is not that fact in itself proof that they exist?"

"Because a god has been believed in for hundreds of thousands of years by millions of people does not prove that that god exists. An idea, to be believed in, even fanatically, does not need to be true. For people, Moses, believe with their emotions, not with their brains."

"Yet have not Amon and Ra and Ptah and the other gods made Egypt great? Have they not set us above all other peoples

and made Egypt the most civilized, the most wondrous country in the world?"

"Egypt has, at times, been conquered, by the Nubians, for instance, or by the Hyksos. Where were your gods, then?"

"Mayhap, the people had sinned," Moses would mutter. "Or, perhaps, their belief in the gods had weakened so that the power of the gods of Egypt was made weak."

"Or, perhaps," Ipuwer would suggest gently, since he was coming to perceive regretfully that this lively sensitive youth, whom he had begun to love as his own son, was one of those who possess the need and the instinct for worship, "all this is but part of the pattern in the mind of the One Eternal. Perhaps it is already woven into the pattern that in time to come Egypt shall again be cast down and some other land exalted."

But Moses would not have it so. To him, loving Egypt, such suggestions were blasphemy, and these arguments, as is the way of arguments, ended by confirming within him the belief to which he wanted to cling, that the great gods of Egypt existed and took thought for the land of Egypt. Ipuwer, who was wise and kindly, did not hold this against the boy. Each man, he would have told you tolerantly, must work out that philosophy which is inherent in him and suits his need, and truth, though one, has many faces. So he tempered his teaching with restraint, and Moses, his vital problem settled, turned once more with alert intellect and keen perception to seizing hold of the store of knowledge which lay ready to his mind.

This knowledge, indeed, was never to desert him. Nor did he, until later, comprehend how deeply the mysticism and the spiritual teachings of the priests of Ra sank into him. At the time he gloried in the discovery that, of all the brilliant scholars at On, none was quite so brilliant as himself. It made him proud also to realize that, even at sixteen, by a precocity which amazed the priests, he had an unparalleled skill in magic. Like a boy with a new plaything he experimented with it, finding with delight that by using the methods taught him by the priests, he could produce illusion upon illusion, binding the minds of his fellow scholars so that he could make a rod appear to them to be a serpent and a vast expanse of plain to seem an illimitable sea and a slip of pomegranate to grow and put out flowers and bear fruit all within the space of a few moments.

In every path of knowledge, indeed, Moses outstripped his companions so that at times Sinuhe would gaze on him with an admiration in which there was a touch of irritation. To Sinuhe it was scarcely befitting a prince of Egypt to be so preoccupied with the lore one delved from papyrus rolls and it troubled him

that his friend had little leisure for the taverns and the girls of On. Sinuhe, of course, as suited his rank, had already had his experiences.

But his friend appeared to have a certain shyness towards women. This was incomprehensible to Sinuhe. Sinuhe did not know, as Moses would have known if he had been able and willing to analyse himself, that this seeming timidity was not timidity but a deep revulsion against things sexual which dated back to that morning, so long ago now, when, lying face downwards in the grass, Moses had been compelled to realize the truth about Merneptah and his mother. This dislike and distrust, in fact, was so strong that it threatened to turn Moses into a recluse, one who would take away from On nothing more than the cloistered knowledge of the temple courts.

And then, during his last year at On, when he was eighteen, Moses met Niiy. Niiy was a laughing girl in her father's tavern; and this tavern had, during this year, for some reason to which Niiy undoubtedly contributed, become the most popular rendezvous for the students of On. Moses went there one day with Sinuhe. He saw Niiy. He watched her moving about with a quick repartee for each lively suggestion and a laughing evasion of the amorousness of the scholars, clumsy as bear cubs trying to play. She attracted Moses, as much by her inner aloofness as by her rounded body. He went back again. But only to watch. Unlike the rest, he tried nothing further. He simply sat with his beer in front of him and watched.

The unusual is a challenge. Niiy noticed Moses. At first his quietness piqued her. Then it intrigued and attracted her. And Niiy, to whom to make love, if one were in the mood and attracted, was as natural and as simple as for a humming-bird to gather nectar from the bright blooms of flowers, soon removed from Moses his fear of sex and his revulsion. Lying with her in the green fields outside On as the purple-tinted dusk fell, the sunset a rosy glow in the west, the frogs croaking by the river, the while to their ears came the melancholy creaking of the shadufs and the plaintive, age-old songs of the peasant women bearing the life-giving water to their huts, Moses felt at times that his heart would burst, so good life was. He was to have other women. But none of them, except one, was ever to efface the recollection of Niiy from him, since his memory of her was inextricably mingled with the quiet mornings in the temple courts and the lazy afternoons in a boat on the placid river, and with the long evenings under the stars of On. Moses was, in fact, passing through one of those periods so rare in human experience, when a unit of time is perfect in itself, divorced from regret for the past or fear for the future,

an interlude when life becomes for the brief moment what poets have sometimes dreamed it to be, and what it might be, were it not for humanity's lusts and cruelties and its bitter rules born out of cruelties either suffered or inflicted.

Such days are all too fleeting nor does one realize all the happiness of them until they are part of the past. When Moses was nineteen Bint-Anath took him away from On and brought him to the court, considering it time to launch him on the real career she had in mind for him. The boy was unhappy at first. After the peace of the scholar-city, where life flowed along like a placid stream, unstirred by intrigue or pursuit of power, the dizzying whirl of the court and the ceaseless struggle for position and influence seemed unreal and worthless. He wanted to return to On. But Bint-Anath knew how to find the cure. She exercised all her charm. She used all the influence of the affection and adoration which her adopted son felt for her. She played cunningly on that hatred of Merneptah which Moses had never overcome. She revealed to him something of her own plans and purposes, and probed for the ambition which, she knew, lay dormant in the young man. The tiger roused itself little by little. Moses began to forget the long days in the temple courts. At first tentatively, and then eagerly, he flung himself into the life of the court. The influence of Ipuwer receded. The mysticism which the priests of Ra had developed in him became buried under the hurrying life and the open cynicism of the Pharaoh's palace. He lost his interest in the power to produce illusion. Niiy became a memory. Within a year, so it seemed, it was as if Moses had never been at On and, whenever he did think of it, it was to look back towards it as to a remembered Paradise that never was.

And meantime, during these same years, down in Tanis, Jochebed had opened a shop, giving herself and her family Syrian names as a protection, and had re-established herself. Amram, it is true, was of little use to her. For Amram, as age began to lay hold of him, withdrew further and further into his dreaming abstractions, pondering on the inscrutable Will of Yahweh and on the legends of his people and, most of all, on that idea which Jochebed had first put into his head that his son, Moses, his son who was growing up as a Prince of Egypt, might be the Deliverer in whom he had come to believe.

If Amram, however, was almost useless, Aaron soon became a joy to his mother. Aaron learned early to cringe before his superiors and to take a kick in the backside and to thank the kicker. But in Aaron, as he came to manhood, was a hard-headedness and a shrewdness which surpassed that of Jochebed

herself. By the time he was fifteen he had taken over the management of the shop. It was he, who, shortly afterwards, perceived that to spend hours, lovingly, with one's own hands on the objects which were made for sale, might be artistry but would never bring wealth. Over his father's protests, he brought workers into the shop to increase the output. From this victory it was but a step to stock goods bought from the artisans and the caravans. Before long, whips and gold-mounted staves from Canaan and chased daggers of Phoenicia and trinkets for women, necklaces of carnelian and amethyst, bangles of silver and brass and copper and beads of glass and goods of many kinds, began to find a place beside the skilled perfection of Amram's work so that the shop of Hadad, the Syrian, as Aaron was now known, became prosperous in Tanis.

In all this Aaron was practical. There was one point, however, in which he was not practical. It was hard to explain. Perhaps the cause lay in some obscure memory of that terror which, when he was three, had overwhelmed the Hebrews. Possibly the recollection of the years when his mother had lived in Bint-Anath's palace and his brother, Moses, had been brought to the house in Memphis to look on him with Egyptian eyes, had something to do with it, or it may have been that Amram's influence was more subtle and pervasive than one would have guessed. In any case, there was in Aaron a passionate sense of race which was equalled only by his hatred of the Egyptian oppressors. From the time that he was sixteen he accompanied his father on the visits to Goshen which Amram still insisted on making. Then, when a sickness of the legs and back which no physician could cure enfeebled Amram, Aaron went by himself.

But where Amram had preached of Yahweh and of submission to His will until the promised Deliverer should come, Aaron looked around for something definite. He wanted something that a man could get his teeth into and he was, like Nun, somewhat sceptical of Yahweh, though in a different way. The Egyptian gods, according to Aaron's observation, were much more practical than Yahweh. They did things for their worshippers, bestowing on them wealth and happiness and making them masters over the Hebrews; whereas, for all the good He was to His people, Yahweh might as well never have been. So Aaron turned to the young men, picking out one here, another there. By the time Moses left On for the court, Aaron had already formed several bands of young Hebrews who were bound together by oaths and who recognized each other by secret signs.

Their achievements were not weighty. They were, in fact, like rats trying to nibble away the pyramids. But if an overseer

were too outrageously cruel, he might be found dead; or, if a Hebrew were marked out for torture, there were a few occasions, if circumstances were favourable, when he was spirited away and only Aaron knew that, through the help of certain caravan leaders, that man had been shipped out of Egypt.

In this way Aaron reconciled his dominant instinct for property and his inborn sense of race. If he ever thought of faltering, by his side was Miriam. For in Miriam, who had grown up as a gaunt, embittered young woman who never seemed to have had any youth, was a fanaticism of race which made the emotions of Aaron seem pale. There were, indeed, moments, as Jochebed began to feel the weight of the years, when she would look around at her two children and wonder, as every mother sometimes wonders, how she had managed to bring these two strangers into the world. But, for the most part, Jochebed was content. Moses, her beloved son, was safe. And Moses was a Prince of Egypt.

CHAPTER XI

It was five years since Moses had left On. On this bright morning he was pacing to and fro in a room of the huge palace which the Pharaoh had recently had built for himself near Avaris at the north-eastern corner of Egypt. Had Jochebed been able to look at her son she would scarcely have recognized him. In Jochebed's memory, no matter what her reason told her, Moses still remained as she had last seen him, a small boy lying back on his couch in the palace near Memphis and watching her with bright eyes while she prepared to leave him. But the young man of twenty-four whom Bint-Anath was watching had little in common, to outward seeming, with that boy of seven. The years had framed him stalwart and bronzed and handsome. They had put the stamp of ambition and the assurance of power and position on his face. Only in the restless energy which breathed forth from him and in the vivid, eloquent eyes and in the mobile, sensitive lips could one, if one looked closely enough, see something of the boy who had said his prayers at Jochebed's knee and had played in Amram's shop and had cried out at the thought of death threatening his nurse.

Gazing at him, indeed, the Princess felt quite well satisfied with her creation. There had been times in earlier years when, observing Moses with a close intensity, she had seen something of Jochebed in him, in his tendency to sympathize with the weak, in his desire while under the influence of the mysticism of Ipuwer,

to become a priest, in the sensitivity he still possessed. All that, however, she considered wisely and affectionately, was subordinated now to the fire of ambition which she had succeeded in cherishing until it was a devouring flame.

It was this ambition which was burning in Moses at this moment. During the first year or so after he had emerged from the sheltered, unreal life of On into the hurly-burly of the court he had merely been attached to administrative commissions or to one after another of the constant military expeditions which the empire of Egypt demanded. Two years ago, however, through the influence of Bint-Anath, a small command against a tribe of Libyan marauders had been given him. He had been successful. He had also discovered within himself the ability to organize and the instinct for leadership. The next year he had been sent up into Canaan and Syria on a routine check of the Egyptian garrisons in those countries. Then, on his return, he had secured his most important post so far, a command against the Troglodytes of the Egyptian desert who had been raiding the caravans on the route from Thebes to the ports on the eastern coast.

The Troglodytes were ordinarily the grave of military reputations. They lived like conies in holes scattered over the inaccessible desert so that a general could wear the heart out of his troops trying to come at them. Then, after he had traversed all their country and had met with no opposition, far to his rear an assault would come. But Moses by a swift and unexpected march straight across the desert had managed to catch them assembled at their annual gathering and had spread such a ruthless slaughter amongst them that it would be a generation, at least, before they troubled Egypt again. Flushed with triumph he had led his troops back to the court at Avaris where, for the past three years, the Pharaoh had established himself, pursuant to his decision to build himself a great city at this point and a line of forts from it to the Bitter Lakes, in order to defend his eastern boundary.

Moses' arrival had been exactly coincident with the startling news from the South that a great revolt had broken out in Kush and had spread like a leaping flame over all the country beyond the First Cataract. Since Kush was a powerful and extensive region so that out of it, from time to time in the past, invaders had poured into Upper Egypt, conquering it, and since the country was partially civilized and its warriors were fierce fighting men, there could be no question of a casual or routine military expedition against it. Kush would require a major campaign, and Moses had not even thought of the possibility of himself, a mere youth, being given the command against the country until the Princess had put it into his mind. Since then, however,

he had thought of little else. He stopped his pacing now to look at Bint-Anath.

"Is there nothing more that we can do?" he asked.

The Princess shook her head.

"If only Merneptah doesn't get it," Moses muttered, clenching and unclenching his hands and frowning darkly.

The Princess was rather amused than otherwise by the violence of Moses' tone. At the same time she shared in the hatred which her adopted son felt for his uncle, though her motive, in part, was different. Ever since that evening, seventeen years ago, when Merneptah had struck her in the face, Merneptah and his mother had been constantly attempting to block her; and, with the death of Khamwese and five others of the Pharaoh's older sons, Merneptah had succeeded in making himself a power. She said:

"We must face the facts, son. Merneptah has become the Pharaoh's foremost general. It is natural for him to be selected."

"There's Intef, the Vizier of the Northland," Moses observed, pondering. "Sinuhe is his nephew. Intef could put a word in the Pharaoh's ear."

"I would not advise it. Trust me, Moses. In these days, one can push the Pharaoh only so far. He becomes suspicious of too much pleasure."

"Merneptah is leaving no stone unturned."

"In that lies a hope for us."

The Princess saw, however, that Moses was not convinced. Rising, she came over to him, her figure still as slim and as graceful as it had been seventeen years before. She put a hand on his shoulder. "Believe me, son, I know best," she observed. "Have I ever failed you?"

"No, Mother," Moses answered quickly, turning to put an arm about her. "No, never."

Bint-Anath's face was softer than most people had ever seen it. "Then, trust me," she repeated. "I have done all I could with the Pharaoh, planted a hint here about Merneptah, a suspicion there. I suggested yesterday, casually, that Merneptah acts as if he thought himself already Pharaoh—and left it at that. Let us hope now that Merneptah, being stupid, will play into our hands by his persistence. There is no more to do. We must wait."

"Waiting is hard," Moses murmured, releasing her.

"I know," Bint-Anath agreed. She sat down again and glanced up at her adopted son, loving him with a fierceness which worried her. "Don't be too disappointed, son, if this command does not fall into your lap," she went on. "Remember, Merneptah is

well on in his middle thirties, an experienced general. You are still very young."

"Merneptah couldn't defeat the Troglodytes three years ago," Moses pointed out quickly. "They slipped through his fingers. I caught them."

"I know. But I am trying to make you see it as the Pharaoh may look at it. Kush is a different pot of stew from the Troglodytes. A defeat there might be very serious, might even endanger Egypt. And you are only twenty-four. Other chances will come."

But Moses could not, at this moment, accept Bint-Anath's philosophical point of view. It was not only that he was young and wanted things with the intensity of the young and hated Merneptah with the same intensity. There was in him, in addition, a singleness of purpose, once his desire had been captured, which made him feel now that there was nothing else in the world that he wished, except this one command. He said:

"Surely the Pharaoh must come to his decision soon."

"No one can predict the Pharaoh."

"It is a month since the news came. The army is ready. The fleet is ready."

The Princess thought a moment, watching her adopted son as he began to pace up and down again. "Why not visit Sinuhe," she suggested.

Moses' face brightened. He stopped his tramping to and fro and, coming over, kissed the Princess.

"You always know what I need," he observed affectionately.

The Princess patted his hand.

"Run along now," she said. "And by the way," she added with a seemingly casual air as he started off, "you might think of marriage sometime."

"Marriage!" he observed in disbelief.

"Yes," the Princess answered calmly. "A good marriage is a ladder to power. We must choose your first and principal wife carefully, with that in view. A good family with influential connections—Sinuhe's sister, for instance. Think about it, Moses."

"I'll leave you to think about that," Moses retorted laughingly, and went out the door. The Princess looked after him, listening to his strong steps going down the corridor. A thought which had come to her mind more than once in these past few months recurred to her, that her whole life was by now centred in this adopted son of hers, so that she was, in a way, captive to her own creation and, if anything happened to destroy that creation, she herself would be destroyed.

She dismissed the thought impatiently. What could happen?

Jochebed was out of sight and, therefore, out of mind and all the court by this time accepted Moses for what he seemed to be, her own son and the grandson of the Pharaoh. As for Moses himself, her control over him was complete. She had not only blotted out the influence of Jochebed and broken the hold Ipuwer had had on him, but was even secure from other women, seeing that he took women now as a Prince of Egypt should take them and as she herself, cunningly divining a danger and, therefore, throwing beautiful slave girls in his path, had taught him to take them, casually, pleasantly, as if they were a particularly delightful meal but of no more importance than that. So she did not have anything to fear in that direction. No, she would pick his first and principal wife for him, a girl who, like Sinuhe's sister, would be under her thumb and would, therefore, possess no more of Moses than she permitted her to have. She would lead Moses on from power to power. Merneptah, it was true, was an obstacle and a threat, and the Princess had, in fact, accepted a suite of rooms in her father's palace at Avaris instead of having a villa built for herself simply in order to keep a more vigilant eye on him. In time, however, she hoped to remove him. And then—Bint-Anath's nostrils dilated—then if the Pharaoh lived long enough—

There was a smile on her lips as she gazed forward into the possibilities of the future.

CHAPTER XII

SINUHE, Moses discovered, was not in the pleasant villa which, as a young bachelor of somewhat luxurious tastes, he maintained on the bank of the river to the south of the Pharaoh's palace, but was in Avaris with his uncle, Intef. Moses turned his chariot around. At a leisurely pace, since there was no hurry, he proceeded northward, noting the villas which in these past three years had sprung up to his right along this, the easternmost branch of the Nile, and to his left, the broad level fields of the Northland, bright under the cloudless Egyptian sky. Over the palace of the Pharaoh, as he passed, the red and white pennons were fluttering in the gentle breeze. Avaris came into view. It occurred to Moses, looking at the rising city, that here, as everywhere, the genius of Rameses was manifest. Three years ago Avaris, now known as Pi-Rameses, had been merely a miserable and almost deserted village set amidst the ruins of what had been, five centuries back, a great fortress city of those barbarian conquerors

of Egypt, the Hyksos. Now, out of nothing, a mighty city had been created at the easternmost mouth of the Nile. The new-built walls rose up into the bright sky. The obelisks of the temples gleamed in the sun. Out on the blue sea were the white sails of ships making for the crowded harbour. And all this out of nothing—in three years.

Moses felt his heart swell with admiration for the Pharaoh, his grandfather. But mingled with his feeling was something else. To Moses the Pharaoh was Egypt and to Moses Egypt, his Egypt, was still the most marvellous, the most wonderful country in the world. Sinuhe, his friend, took this for granted. But to Moses, with his necessity to worship someone or somewhat, the fact of Egypt's glory and Egypt's wisdom and Egypt's ancient and marvellous civilization had never lost its freshness and its wonder, as if the gods of Egypt, ironically, never ceased to impress themselves on this Hebrew who thought himself a true Egyptian.

That Egypt's glory was in these days based on the poverty of the peasants and on the sufferings of slaves and, particularly, of the Hebrews did not, except at odd moments, trouble Moses. After all, he himself had never known poverty or degradation or suffering; and, after all, slaves and poverty-stricken peasantry were so much a part of the world in which he lived that he never noticed them especially, any more than one notices a bearded man in an age when all men wear beards. Yet, as he approached the gates of Avaris, and as a bend in the road brought him alongside a causeway up which gangs of naked Hebrew slaves were tugging huge blocks of stone for a fort wherewith Rameses intended to guard the western flank of the harbour, a slight frown creased his brow, and he slowed his horses to a walk. Aunt Jochebed's people, he was thinking to himself as he could not forbear thinking whenever he saw the Hebrews; and for a moment he wondered vaguely where his nurse was and what she was doing. He asked himself, too, why some people were born slaves and others princes. Those miserable wretches there, toiling in the hot sun, the lash hissing on their naked backs, by what accident of fate or for what sins in some other life, were they doomed to this existence whilst he himself rode along in his chariot, a Prince of Egypt?

But this was, as Ipuwer had once pointed out to him, either to be accepted as the will of the gods or else set down as one of those things which no man could ever possibly know. Moses turned to his horses and, looking ahead, saw a chariot coming to meet him through the gates of the city. He thought he knew that chariot. Yes, it was Sinuhe! A smile illumined his face.

He urged his horses on eagerly. A moment later the two friends met, stopping their chariots side by side.

"I was looking for you," Moses told his friend.

Sinuhe smiled back at him lazily. At twenty-five Sinuhe was everything, so Moses thought observing him, that an aristocratic Egyptian noble should be: lithe and handsome, affecting a languidity which was a mask for an acute intelligence and taking things as they came. Moses, in fact, often envied Sinuhe, not knowing that the very qualities in himself which he himself deplored, his intensity, his impulsiveness, his restless energy, were those which Sinuhe admired. So now Sinuhe, for whom, unlike Moses, the present was always enough and who never felt, as Moses sometimes felt, that he was two or three different persons wrapped up in one body, smiled back at his friend with eyes in which there was a genuine affection and comradeship.

"Has the great decision been reached yet?" he inquired.

Moses' face fell. "No."

"Well, don't worry about it," Sinuhe advised him. "It will be all the same a hundred years hence."

He chirruped to his horses. Side by side they started back towards the palace. But as they came near the causeway Moses pulled up. There, by the roadside, an overseer, his lips drawn back from his teeth, stood over a writhing wretch, lashing him with his whip. Moses could feel Sinuhe glancing across at him curiously. But he felt an emotion which would have seemed strange to Sinuhe, except towards his equals, the emotion of pity, and he made a half-gesture with his hand. The overseer did not notice it. But the poor wretch, the foam of suffering on his lips, saw it. He writhed round towards Moses as the whip came down, stretching up a quivering hand. Moses hesitated. On his lips was the word of command to let the Hebrew go. But he hesitated. Sinuhe would say nothing. Yet surely he would drop in Sinuhe's estimation if he, a Prince of Egypt, troubled over what happened to a slave. How all the nobles of the court would sneer if they heard of it. And Merneptah—the thought rushed into his mind—Merneptah was in charge of these works around Avaris. What use might not Merneptah make of the incident if he interfered?

He reflected that the command against Kush hung in the balance. He remembered the Pharaoh's maniacal abhorrence of the Hebrews. The words he had so often heard from the Princess flashed into his mind: "Those who would win power must be ruthless, my son."

All this had passed through his mind rapidly. He turned his head away. He spoke to his horses. Yet as he drove back to the palace there was before his eyes the hopeless look in the face

of that poor wretch as he dropped his hand and the whip came down.

Later that evening he forgot it. Later that evening he stood before the Pharaoh, scarcely believing, in spite of his hopes, that he heard aright.

"I have decided to give you the command against Kush," the old man was saying.

There was a humming in Moses' ears. He dropped to his knees, babbling out his thanks. Rameses looked down at him with weary, hooded eyes. Personable enough, he was thinking, though who in Set's name his parents are—that is, if he's not Bint-Anath's own son—that's something I must discover for certain sometime—but, for the present—well, with Harkhuf as the real commander not much can go wrong—as for Merneptah, he presumes too much, that son of mine, he takes too much for granted—do him good to stay behind and spend his time putting the fear of Amon into the Hebrews—as for this young man, there's no danger of his thinking he can push me off my throne—He thought this far and then cut Moses' thanks and gratitude short.

"Rise up, young man," he said dryly. And then, as Moses got to his feet, he added: "Remember, Prince Aahmose, it is no sinecure. This will be no affair of the Troglodytes."

"I realize that, O Horus-on-Earth," Moses said in an awed manner. "I promise you that I will do everything possible since your Divinity has so honoured me."

Rameses glanced at him. It was somewhat refreshing to one who had grown old in the adulation and insincerity of those around him to observe the obvious frankness of this youth's admiration and worship. He said, expanding a little:

"The rebels of Kush have revolted against my godhead. For that they must be punished, Prince Aahmose. Sweep through their land with sword and fire. Make a peace, a Pharaoh's peace, so that Kush may trouble us no more."

"Yes, Majesty."

Rameses leaned forward. His cold eyes pierced deeply.

"And remember," he went on, "beyond the First Cataract the whole country is in revolt. Beyond the First Cataract, *you* are the Pharaoh. Remember that, Prince Aahmose."

Moses thought that his feelings must overcome him, so proud he felt. "Yes, Majesty," he answered, holding his head high, and thinking within himself: How proud my mother will be. As soon as I get away from here I must tell her. How proud she will be.

It was while he was rushing from the private audience room of the Pharaoh to his mother's suite that Moses almost collided

with Merneptah and a group of his friends. It was something for which he was not prepared, although he might have expected it. He stopped, somewhat embarrassed, both by his haste and his hatred.

"Well, youngster," Merneptah growled contemptuously in his heavy arrogant voice, "where are you off to so fast? What did the Pharaoh, my father, have to say to you—of all people?"

So Merneptah did not know as yet! Confidence flowed into Moses.

"I fancy my dear uncle, that you will discover that for yourself," he retorted.

Merneptah looked at him with suspicion written in his somewhat bulging eyes and on the mouth which had become obstinate and dictatorial with the years. It was part of Moses' youthfulness that he was not able to comprehend that it had never really entered Merneptah's mind, not even yet, that this young man, whom he still thought of as a spoiled brat, could actually be a serious competitor. To him Moses was at best merely a presumptuous upstart. But he did not like the gleam in Moses' eyes.

"What did he say to you?" he persisted. "That I am to be commander against Kush? He might," he added, puffing out his lips, "have left that for me to announce."

"What? Has he given you the command?"

"Not yet," Merneptah admitted. "Still there is no doubt of it. Even now I am on my way to him."

"And I am on my way to my mother," Moses exclaimed, letting his exultation out in a rush. "I go to tell her that the Pharaoh, my grandfather, has honoured me. I go to tell her that I will soon be on my way to Kush."

He saw the look of dazed incredulity on Merneptah's face succeeded by a ludicrous expression of dawning realization followed in turn by a slow purplish flush of rage. He saw, too, the expressions of amazement on the faces of those about Merneptah. He laughed, all the gathered hatred of Merneptah which had festered within him since he was a boy, and which had been added to in his years at the court on every occasion when Merneptah, with a heavy hand, had slighted him or checked him, coming to the surface.

"Good-bye, Uncle," he said. "As you hound the Hebrews in Avaris, think of me in Kush—Uncle."

"Uncle!" Merneptah spat it out. "I am no uncle of yours—bastard!"

But Moses was already away down the hall.

They celebrated the triumph that night, Bint-Anath and

Sinuhe and Moses. Moses was, in fact, quite beyond himself. He drank too much. He babbled to no purpose while Sinuhe watched him with an indulgent smile and Bint-Anath, leaning over, whispered to one of her personal slaves, Theanu, who had been chosen for her beauty, and then leaned back to regard her adopted son with affection—an affection in which was mingled a desire to box his ears and to remind him that those who have got their feet on the first rungs of the ladder of power cannot afford to relax their vigilance, not even for a second. For she could divine, if Moses could not, what Tiyy would be thinking and planning, over in her palace. Tiyy would realize now that Moses was a real menace, a dangerous opponent to her plans for her son, Merneptah. And Tiyy was as devious as a serpent and just as deadly. Well she was a match for Tiyy. Only let the gods grant that Moses be successful. Let the gods grant that he return in triumph from Kush. For a woman's doubt assailed her. Kush was dangerous. Kush was a task for a great general, not for a young man who drank too much and babbled foolishly. Yes, she prayed wordlessly, deciding to offer great gifts to Amon, let the gods grant that Moses, her son, return triumphant over Kush—or, at least, not defeated.

CHAPTER XIII

THE easternmost branch of the divided Nile is a sluggish stream. From On to Avaris it winds between the dense reeds and sinuous line of palms, which betray its path, like some legendary monster, loath to let go of the land which its coils have possessed, and in a way, created.

This impression is evident to the thoughtful observer by day. In that grey and ghostly hour before the dawn when a long banner of mist twists and twines along the channel of the river and when the crocodiles are indistinguishable from inert logs and a splash in the sullen, shadowy water may be the leap of a fish or the course of a lumbering hippopotamus, the illusion that one moves through some strange, unknown world, but lately risen from the egg of time, is almost overpowering. Or so, at least, it seemed for a moment to the solitary watcher who stood on the prow of the ship which was breasting its way downstream through the mist like a duck swimming high in water. To the rowers behind him, he was not an ordinary mortal. To them he was Prince Aahmose, the grandson of the Pharaoh, the magnificent and somewhat arrogant young man for whom fortune

seemed to reserve her most brilliant gifts and who, for some reason, inexplicable to them, had come out on deck, when he might have been couched soft in the curtained cabin amidships by the side of a yielding and exquisitely shaped woman. But then, the rowers could not quite imagine this splendid young prince, born, so far as they knew, to luxury and power, as really having desires and feelings and functions similar to their own.

Moses, however, had no interest in what his men might be thinking. He had gotten up from the woman who slept beside him and come out on deck because of the high excitement which had wakened him and would not let him go to sleep again. Now, in spite of the grey, unreal world about him, his excitement was still high. He leaned against the rail. He stared at the wavering, dimly seen reeds and palms, not really seeing them but visualizing instead the moment, hourly drawing closer, of his return to the palace of the Pharaoh.

The thought made him turn and glance behind him. There, blunt noses thrusting high through the vapour and glimpsed only as vague, unsubstantial shapes, the vessels of his fleet were following him. Victory! Moses told himself proudly. His fleet which he was leading back in triumph to the Pharaoh! Seven captive nobles of Kush lay underneath the deck on which he stood. Uncounted spoil was in the other ships which followed. Triumph! Moses tasted again the flavour of the despatch he had sent on ahead to his grandfather, the Pharaoh:

To the Wearer-of-the-Double-Crown, the Ruler-of-the-Two-Lands, Horus-on-Earth [he had written]: Your servant, Aahmose, prostrates himself at your feet. By the help of Amon and the power of the Pharaoh I have crushed the rebels of Kush. Their cities have I captured. Their armies have I destroyed. Their leaders have I either slain or spared them only to bring them back alive to thy presence so that thou mayest pass judgment on them. In the whole of Kush there is neither man nor woman nor child who dares speak against the Pharaoh. Thus have I fulfilled thy commands, O He-Whose-Name-May-Not-be-Spoken.

There was a smile on his lips as he turned back to the river before him. Victory! Triumph! Once again he visualized the moment at the landing place in front of the Pharaoh's palace. They would be all there, awaiting him—Sinuhe, the Pharaoh, his mother, the whole court. How proud his mother would be of him! Yes, not even his mother could have anticipated that he would crush the rebels of Kush so completely in a space of

less than a year. It had been a great risk he had taken. Harkhuf had advised against it. To Harkhuf, to leave the river and the fleet and to march straight across the great bend of the desert caused by the winding of the Nile against Napata, the capital city of Kush, was foolhardy. It was, according to Harkhuf, a complete violation of all the principles of war. One might be cut off in the desert. One would certainly be destroyed by lack of food and supplies if Napata did not fall at the first assault.

Well, it had come off, Moses thought, stretching himself pleasantly. He had won—not, according to the rules of war, perhaps—but in any case he had won. It had been brilliant, he told himself, relaxing, not to have battered against the gates of Napata according to the rules of war, but to have sent soldiers floating down the river on rafts to enter the city from its undefended side with the attack on the gates as a feint only. Of course, if he had lost, it would have been different.

But now—rules of war or not—victory! A successful general at twenty-five! Was there anything, he asked himself, exultantly, to which he might not aspire? Power! Glory! The adulation of the crowd! The approval of the Pharaoh! The smile of his mother! And with him, too, he brought the greatest treasure of all, a treasure to put heart into a man, to give him confidence, to make him feel that there was nothing, no, nothing, which he could not achieve.

A look of dreaming tenderness softened the expression of pride and exultation on the young Prince's face as his thoughts took their way to the woman who lay sleeping in his cabin. But there was reflection there as well. Crossing his arms he stared out at the serpentine veil of mist, floating tenuously between the dark line of trees and reeds on either side. He saw and did not see the waterfowl, rising out of the mist before the progress of the boat to flop away protestingly, vague, ungainly shapes. Moses, in fact, was not as yet able to comprehend entirely what had happened to him that night in the captured city of Napata, any more than one realizes completely an earthquake or a hurricane or any other elemental phenomenon. From the first moment that he had seen her standing there, proud and slim and silent amongst the kneeling, wailing captive women, something inexplicable had caught at him, had put, as it were, a perceptible hush on his whole being as if his very soul had paused with hushed breath to look. Yes, for that instant, he had forgotten that he was a grandson of the Pharaoh, standing in the midst of a conquered city, its flames red, windswept beards against the black sky. In that instant there had been no one in the world except himself and Tharbis.

He had tried to deny that instant, he remembered. As the present had rushed back on him he had reminded himself that this was a captive woman of Kush, whilst he was a Prince of Egypt. The palace of Egypt swarmed with slave girls. As his mother had taught him, one took them into one's bed when one felt the need or a momentary attraction and dismissed them and thought no more of it. This woman was no more beautiful than they.

And so that night, somewhat brutally, he had taken Tharbis, the daughter of the King of Kush. The curious thing was that the possession of her had neither assuaged his desire nor dispelled the strange, unknown feeling within him. Instead, in the morning, gazing down at her, the traces of tears still on her cheeks, her body twisted in sleep so that the swell of her hip was a line of purest beauty, he had felt a stab in his heart, an uneasy, almost wistful premonition that, unless he put her out of his mind quickly, the days of his careless, untouched freedom were gone.

One does not give up such freedom lightly. In the next few days Moses flung himself with desperate energy into the thousand and one details of reorganizing the conquered land; executing without a thought of mercy thousands of prisoners—and amongst them the King of Kush, with a feeling that thus he was cutting himself off from Tharbis—arranging for the payment of tribute, picking out the strategic points for re-establishing the Egyptian garrison.

Yet he could not forget her. He took her again—savagely. It was then that, tears in his own eyes at the strange futility of the physical act, he realized that with this one woman, for some reason beyond his experience and his understanding, the possession of her body was not enough unless he had also the complete surrender of herself, apart from and together with her body. It was so unknown a feeling to him that he was like a blind man who senses near to him in some sunless cave an untold treasure, more precious than gold or rubies or the flashing points of diamonds. The confident Prince of Egypt possessing a captive woman was changed into a man, strangely humble, who spoke in halting, untried words to one whom he recognized, albeit imperfectly as yet, as more essential than power, more vital than careless freedom. Tharbis looked up at him. She did not tell him so directly. That was not her way. But in the days—and nights—which followed, while his heart cried out to her to become his without reserve, she managed to convey to him that, although she was attracted to him, one thing stood in the way of complete surrender of herself to him. How could she, her whole manner rather than her words said to him, entrust herself to him in the

self-abnegating confidence of love, so long as she was a captive, subject to his whim, not knowing when she might be cast aside, dishonoured, or passed on to one of his captains?

Moses assured her violently that this could never be, that no man other than himself would ever have her. Tharbis said nothing. But she remained reserved, a part of herself aloof. Moses could never say whether or not she had ever whispered the word: "marriage", or whether that word arose of itself in his own mind. But it was certain that, suddenly, it became evident to him that the one, the only sure way to win that which by now was more precious to him than even his return in triumph to the Pharaoh's court was marriage.

Reason told him bluntly that this idea was folly. His mind pointed out to him that the Pharaoh would not approve of his marrying the daughter of a rebel and that to do so might stand in the way of the career which was opening brilliantly before him. Still more cogent was the memory that his mother was planning that his first and principal wife should be Sinuhe's sister, or some other woman from one of the great houses of Egypt, in order that his position in the court might be even more enhanced. Take Tharbis as your concubine, if you can't do without her, reason argued. But don't marry her.

He had been beyond reason. The turn of her head, the sway of her hips, the tones of her voice, kept recurring to him, obsessing him. Moses had been too young—was still too young—to comprehend that his spirit as well as his senses were enchained or that he was captive to the illusion wherewith his imagination had clothed Tharbis. He only knew—as he knew now, standing here and thinking of her—that she stirred in him a feeling akin to that which permeated him when he perceived the unreachable and too perfect beauty of the sunset and the sunrise, so that when he looked at her there was aroused in him a reverence which almost stilled desire. Niiy? Niiy had been unique, a lovely interlude which he would never forget. But Tharbis absorbed all of him. Tharbis was his very life, his being; not lust, scarcely desire, but a shrine at which his very heart knelt in worship. To such a feeling one could not offer anything but the highest honour within one's power. Were there not Pharaohs who had wedded the princesses of Kush? Was not the surest way to conciliate the land to marry the daughter of its king? Above all, if to make Tharbis his first and principal wife would be to win the complete gift of herself, not merely of her body but of her love and her trust, then he would abdicate reason. Nor had he any idea that these were the thoughts which Tharbis in her own very feminine way had contrived that he should have. For

Tharbis, having lived at a court which had aped as far as possible the court of Egypt, knew quite clearly the difference in Egypt between the power and position of a concubine and a first wife.

It was Tharbis, too, who, once Moses had decided upon marriage, had managed so that they should be married before they returned to Avaris, since it was quite clear to her that, having caught her bird, it was better to cage him at once. Nor was Moses averse. He knew only too well that, if they waited until Avaris that both his mother and the Pharaoh would put obstacles in his way and, besides, in the grip of his strange, new emotion, the hours were slow until that transcendental moment when he would feel, at last, the complete surrender of Tharbis to himself.

And so at Thebes, before the High-Priest of Amon, in the most binding of ceremonies, Moses had taken Tharbis to wife and at first he had not cared what either the Pharaoh or his mother might think or say. Now, however, as he drew near Avaris, he was realizing more vividly the difficulties before him. It occurred to him that it might have been better to prepare both of them—and especially his mother—in the letters he had sent; though, at the time, in the first flush of enthralment, it had seemed to him that Tharbis would be her own best explanation. He frowned darkly at the river, not noticing how insensibly the greyness had lightened, or how the pale stars had begun to disappear at the nearness of dawn. Just how would the Princess, his mother, react to a bride of whom she had never heard, above all, one whom she had not chosen and who would not add to his power at court? Yet, he argued with himself, he was not a child. Surely, for once, the Princess would allow him to reach a decision on his own. Surely . . .

A hand slipped into his. His own hand closed over it before he turned to look. The single garment she wore, wrapped closely about her, moulded the pouting breasts, set wide apart, and accentuated the rounded swell of the hips and the delicate, fragile waist. To Moses the poise of her head and uptilted chin was proud, and the outline of her face, vague in the half light, was the home of a haunting beauty and of a sensitivity which abased him in adoration. Looking at her his doubts and his uncertainties dropped from him like a cloak thrown off. How could anyone help loving her? In any case, no matter what the Princess might think, he loved her.

"Darling," he whispered, hugging her arm against his side.

She seemed to come closer to him without moving. He was conscious of the lap of the water against the bows of the ship and of the slow plash of the oar blades and of the grey unsub-

stantial light around them. It merged in with his mood so that he scarcely heard her murmur:

"How long before we are there?"

"In an hour or two, dearest," he answered, rousing himself. A picture flashed before him of his triumph and of how she, the woman he loved, would see him, the centre of honour, the person to whom all eyes turned. "No," he added, with an exultant note in his voice, "it won't be long."

It surprised him to feel a shiver run through the body which was pressed against him from hip to shoulder. For a moment he was puzzled. Then, in a sudden flash of intuition, he knew. Here she was alone in a strange land, a captive princess of faraway, barbaric Kush, about to face the brilliant court of the most civilized country in the world, a country which was a place of gaped-at marvels in Napata. He had been thinking of himself only. He had left her alone. Releasing her hand, he slipped his arm around her waist, a part of himself thrilling to feel it yield to him.

"There's nothing to be afraid of, my dear," he said tenderly.

"But I am afraid."

"They're just people, darling. People like me. You're not afraid of me, surely?"

Tharbis smiled at him briefly. She did not tell him that she had learned all of him that she needed to know on that very first night; or that from that moment she had ceased to have any fear of him. If a woman is like Tharbis and has already had experience of men she is not afraid of that over which she has power. As for other considerations, such as the killing of her father—who, after all, had had scores of wives and concubines and hordes of other children—those were in the past and done with; and Moses, after all, was not only a conqueror but, also, a Prince of Egypt. Tharbis had always wanted to see Egypt. And she had managed to get him to marry her, too. That was an achievement of which Tharbis was proud. Married! The first and principal wife of a Prince of Egypt! Tharbis was, in fact, though Moses was far from realizing it, too shallowly feminine to be interested in anything but the present and the future, and only in these so far as they were likely to affect herself. But the Princess Bint-Anath was in the immediate future, and Tharbis, listening to Moses talk of her, had sensed some time ago that her husband's mother might be troublesome and dangerous. Now that she was nearing the court the thought of this unknown Bint-Anath had recurred to her. In answer to Moses' question she whispered:

"I wonder what she will think of me?"

Moses knew whom she meant. But he did not communicate his perplexities to her. In this moment, too, he felt that no one, not even his mother, could fail to be captivated by his bride. She—and the Pharaoh—would see her as he saw her. His laugh rang out reassuringly.

"She'll like you, darling. How could she help it? And look, a good omen. The dawn is coming."

Tharbis looked. The first streaks of light were shooting up above the eastern horizon like searching rosy-tinted fingers. In the west where lately had been nothing but a cold, forbidding grey, a quivering haze of crimson sprang into being. The eastern sky, not to be outmatched, flushed suddenly into a rippling, pulsating glory of rose and pink and flaming red. On the river the mist began to shred into tattered streamers as if torn by some unseen, ghostly wind. Instant by instant the light increased. From the palms long shadows in purple and violet walked across the river and the level plain. Around the ships a ruddy light seemed to touch and linger so that in this moment they were not, as they would be later, real vessels on an earthly river but dream barks of the gods floating on the heavenly Nile. It had a deep effect on Moses. All his expectations of triumph and his perplexities about Bint-Anath forgotten, he drew in a long breath and his arm tightened around Tharbis. She yielded to the pressure, not because she understood that Moses was overcome by the feast of beauty before him, too great for the senses to take in and therefore tinged with inexpressible sadness, but because her instinct had told her that to yield to Moses was the surest way to keep him captive to her. Her mind, in fact, was busy at the moment, considering just what she should wear and how best to act. The Pharaoh? He was a man. Tharbis had never had any difficulty with men; though, true to instinct, she had not communicated this part of her life in Napata to Moses. But Bint-Anath? She frowned in concentration.

And, meantime, Moses, believing that Tharbis was experiencing the same emotions as he, watched the sun leap up over the horizon, the watery rim about the glowing fiery centre winking at him. It was miraculous how its mere arrival took the unreality and the magic away from things and put the ordinary colours back on them. Only bedraggled remnants of the mist were left, clinging here and there to hollows along the banks. The water of the river gleamed and sparkled. A hippopotamus came up, snorting. In the vivid palms along the shore the birds were alive and vocal. On either side, where, a brief hour before, had been a muted, ghostly vagueness, the fields of the Northland stretched away to the far horizon, the villages standing out like white rocks in a

sea of green, the water in the canals shining in the sun. Yes, colour had come back to things, colour and sound, the larks singing, the waterfowl squawking, the liquid dip of the oar blades in water.

"Isn't it marvellous?" Moses breathed.

Tharbis turned large eyes on him.

"All this," Moses continued. "Egypt—my Egypt—newborn, Egypt, blessed of the gods."

It was at once his tragedy and his joy that he thought she understood him.

"The most wonderful country in the world," he went on. "Think, Tharbis. All these miles we've come since the First Cataract—the river winding between the yellow flat-topped hills—past Thebes, past Abydos, past Memphis, past the glorious cities of holy Kham. Now, it blossoms into this. The river—Egypt—Egypt—the river. I've often thought that Egypt is like a lotus blossom swaying on a slender lily stem."

It was quite incomprehensible to her. Fields were fields and water, water. It was true the country looked as if it would grow good crops, better than Kush.

"I've never told you," Moses observed leaning on the rail of the ship to gaze out musingly, "but, until I met you, my greatest love was Egypt. In a way, I suppose, it still is. Or, rather, my love for you and for Egypt are the same. They have the same quality, the same intensity, the same . . . well, call it worship, if you like. And I—I am a Prince of Egypt." He looked at her. "Can you understand?"

Tharbis smiled. To Moses that smile meant all that he read into it. His clasp was, for the instant, painful in its strength. But then the boat swam round a bend. Moses relaxed his grasp. He waved his arm.

"Look," he cried. "Look. There's Avaris."

"Where?" Tharbis asked with interest.

"See? That gleam against the sky. Miles away yet. But that's Avaris, Avaris, the city my grandfather, the Pharaoh, created out of nothing."

"Out of nothing?"

Moses told her. Facing her, his eyes sparkling, his hands gesticulating, he explained how until three years before this Avaris had been merely a miserable village.

"It was there, at Avaris, that the Hyksos made their last stand," he continued. "For three years Aahmose, my namesake, the Pharaoh of that day, battered against its walls before he captured it and chased the Hyksos back to Asia. Now, my grandfather, Rameses the Great, has built him a fortress and a city

there, so that from it he may rule both Egypt and the empire in Asia. He calls it—Pi-Rameses. It is not entirely finished yet. You, see, it is to be the eastern buttress of Egypt if another attack should ever come against us out of Asia. In consequence, my grandfather, the Pharaoh, is rearing great walls around it and is building storehouses for grain and weapons and is setting up a line of forts between Avaris and the Bitter Lakes so that no enemy can break through. Even the Hebrews," he added reflectively, "must realize that what they build is a bulwark to Egypt."

Tharbis looked at him questioningly.

"Asiatics who came into Egypt in the wake of the Hyksos," Moses answered briefly and reluctantly. "They live in Goshen. We passed through it yesterday. They are the slaves of the Pharaoh."

The ship swam on. Tharbis stared ahead towards Avaris, beginning to feel an anticipatory thrill of excitement. The red and blue or, no, the white and red, that would be the thing to wear. This Pharaoh, if she could win him over, perhaps Bint-Anath mightn't be so important. Yes, the white and red—and those anklets which had belonged to her mother. She remembered them, the work of an Egyptian artist. Graduated to fit the leg. Of gold, but inlaid cunningly with dainty dragonflies in the green of malachite and the blue of lapis and the glittering red of carnelian. As a child she had always coveted them. She knew every detail by heart. No lady of the court of the Pharaoh, no matter how beautifully turned out, would have anything to surpass them. It gave her confidence just to think of them.

The Hebrews, Moses was thinking. Strange that he could never hear or say that name without a picture of Aunt Jochebed's face or a memory of Uncle Amram. Where were they now? he wondered once more. He had always intended to look for them when he grew up. But he had always seemed too busy. Tanis, his mother had said once. That was the place, so she had said, that they had gone to when, eighteen years ago, Aunt Jochebed had been banished from the palace. Well, next time he was in Tanis. . . .

He straightened, as if casting a load off his shoulders. He stared around at the fields, noticing the young wheat rippling in the sun, observing the peasants busy in the fields, telling himself that what happened to slaves was not important, trying to recapture his feeling of triumph. Egypt—this was Egypt. And he was a Prince of Egypt—what had he to do with the Hebrews? Even so, he could not, at this moment, forget them as he had seen them at Avaris, hauling heavy beams and huge

blocks of stone up the slippery causeway, the lash hissing on their backs. Aunt Jochebed's people. Against his will the hopeless face of the poor wretch who had stretched up his hand to him for mercy and from whom he had turned away came before him. He wished now that he had not turned away. And yet, he argued to himself, it had been none of his business. What were Hebrew slaves to him?

But the face of the poor wretch kept coming between him and his sense of victory. Aunt Jochebed—she would not have wanted him to turn away. He shrugged his shoulders as if, physically, to throw off the picture. He was Aahmose, Prince of Egypt, returning home in triumph with his bride beside him. Let the Hebrews take care of themselves.

CHAPTER XIV

THEY were approaching the landing place. Behind it, the great palace of the Pharaoh gleamed amidst its sheltering palms and acacias. A half-mile downstream the newly built temples and obelisks of Avaris glanced bright, and beyond them the sea was blue and the white sails dipped and flashed in the hot sun.

Moses, however, scarcely noticed the city or the sea or the palace. Standing on the poop, proud in his pleated overtunic and his jewelled collar, he stared eagerly at the throng gathered to greet him. The reality was more glorious than he had dreamed.

"See, Tharbis," he whispered. "There is the Pharaoh. There on the golden throne. That's my mother, the Princess, next to him."

He did not wait for her answer and Tharbis pouted. He had scarcely noticed what she had on, not the red and white gown, moulded diaphanously to her body, nor the golden armlets, nor the way her hair had been coiffed high so as to accentuate her narrow profile and prove that the royal blood of Kush was more Egyptian than Kushite, as indeed it was; not even the golden anklets. Oh well, the women would notice. The Princess Bin-Anath would notice. So would the men—even if Moses did not.

She preened herself a little, looking at the shore. For once, however, her mood did not communicate itself to Moses. Eager, intent, he was occupied in picking out those in whom he was particularly interested; Sinuhe, his friend;¹ Merneptah; Merneptah's mother, Tiyy; Intef, the Vizier of the Northland; all of them. It made him want to fling up his hand and shout.

Such behaviour, of course, would not be seemly in a victorious general, returning home. His glance swept briefly over the crowd of the common folk, held back by the Sherden guards but extending down to the water's edge on either side. Here was a triumph indeed. Already, they were cheering him. As his ship glided slowly towards the mooring posts, the seven nobles of Kush hanging head downward from its prow, Moses, bronzed and straight and stalwart, raised his hand in dignified salute. It was not within his imagination that in that shouting mob of spectators, pressing enthusiastically against the barrier of the guards, the face of his real mother, Jochebed, stared up at him; or that the stoop-shouldered, somewhat furtive-faced man behind her was his brother, Aaron; or that in the gaunt woman next to him was to be discerned the nurse girl, Miriam.

They gazed up at their magnificent son and brother with far different feelings. To Aaron, Moses was by now largely a matter of indifference, a being in a different world, whose fortunate position and easy lot caused him no particular envy, since his own interests were absorbing and vital to him. In Miriam, however, was an intense bitterness. As a girl in the palace it had always been, "Hush! You'll wake Moses," or, "No, you can't do that. You must look after Moses," or "Don't make him cry. The Princess will hear." Now, that spoiled brat had become this splendid young prince. But Miriam could not forget the price which had been paid. For the sake of that young man who stood so arrogantly on the prow of his ship while it was secured to the landing place and a gangway made ready, all of them had been driven from Memphis to live a life of concealment and disguise, cut off from their own people. Because of that young man, at thirty-one, she was still a barren spinster. Miriam did not reflect that, for the same reason, she had been spared the life of the Hebrew women in Goshen or in the brick pits and barracks around Avaris. In the intensity of the feeling of race which the repression of her life had bred in her, she would, in fact, have welcomed fiercely the chance to share the sufferings of her people. Had it not been for her mother and the command of her father, too feeble to leave the shop, which Aaron had opened six months before in Avaris, she would never have come. "Deliverer," she sneered now. "A magnificent Deliverer he'd make—that Egyptian."

But Jochebed stared up at her son with all her self-sacrificing love and all her yearning pride plain to see in her face. It was eighteen years now since she had kissed him for the last time. Eighteen years is an interminable length of days or a mere flicker of an eyelid, according as you view it. During those

years she had toiled in Tanis and, during this last half year, in Avaris, picking up eagerly what fragments of news she could about Moses, without endangering him, and keeping fresh in her mind the picture of him as a boy of seven. Now, as Moses stepped from the ship to the shore she pushed forward a little, her lips parted drinking in all his handsomeness and his pride and his magnificence. This was her reward for the losing of him. This was what she had done for him, though he did not know it and could never know it. What did it matter that, at this moment, her fellow Hebrews were labouring in the brick pits or on the walls of Avaris or on the forts about it? Moses, her son, was safe.

It is doubtful, indeed, if Jochebed even saw Tharbis. But if she did not notice her, Bint-Anath did. From the first moment that her adopted son had come clearly into view, her jealous glance had taken in the woman at his side. Part of her remained intensely proud of this Moses of hers as he came proudly up the steps, the sun bright on his powerful square-cut body and eager face, and knelt before the Pharaoh. But another part of her kept glancing at the woman who had followed him from the ship and was now standing at the foot of the steps, her maid-servants around her. Good-looking enough, Bint-Anath conceded grudgingly. She knew how to dress, too. That diaphanous gown did set off her figure and the armlets and anklets were clearly of Egyptian workmanship. But why was Moses displaying her so publicly? It was evident, in spite of the slenderness of her form and the delicacy of her profile, that she was a kinswoman of those naked, squirming wretches hanging, head-downward, from the prow of the ship. A sense of imminent danger uncoiled in her. Was Moses entangled with this woman? If he was, the sooner she was lopped off from him the better. Bint-Anath, not dreaming in her wildest imaginings that Moses was married to the woman, made up her mind to take steps towards that end as soon as possible.

For the moment, however, there was nothing to be done. Bint-Anath removed her gaze from Tharbis. She saw Tiyy staring across at her with a malignant curiosity in her eyes and flung her a scornful glance before she turned to watch the Pharaoh stretch out his foot to Moses.

"You have done well, Prince Aahmose," she heard Rameses say. "The Pharaoh is pleased with you."

The kiss which Moses placed on the Pharaoh's foot was full of pride and devotion. On the other side of the Pharaoh, Merneptah averted his face sullenly. His mother, Tiyy, tossed her head so violently that it set her wig jiggling, and she stared

off ostentatiously at the crowd. No one noticed how, suddenly, as she surveyed it, her gaze became intent and her chin seemed to make a further effort to meet the nose it was always trying to caress. They were all, except Merneptah and herself, watching Moses and the Pharaoh.

The Pharaoh looked down at the young man before him. His face was, as always, a mask. Behind that mask, he was thinking again with a spark of interest: I wonder who he really is? Aloud he said: "Rise, Aahmose, Prince of Egypt. The Pharaoh gives you leave."

Moses stood up. His face was glowing with pride and also with worship. Rameses felt again the charm of this young man's sincerity, of his obvious adoration. He smiled, a thin smile which barely curved his lips.

"I have said we were pleased with you," he stated. "Our Divinity is also pleased to reward you. I give you a gift, whatever gift you will. Ask and it shall be granted unto you."

This, in front of all the court! For an instant, the scene wavered before Moses' eyes. He was conscious of the pride in the face of his mother. He could sense them all watching, Sinuhe, Merneptah, the Princess Tiyy, all waiting with held breaths to hear what he would choose. And Tharbis was watching, too. Turning he went down the steps. He took Tharbis by the hand. He led her up to the Pharaoh, his gaze on the narrow, clear-cut profile, on the eyes which looked up at the Pharaoh appealingly and a little fearfully as if asking to be liked. How beautiful she was! His heart swelled with love of her. He sank to his knees, drawing her down with him.

"My bride, O Wearer-of-the-Double-Crown, Sword-of-Amon, Ruler-of-the-Two-Lands, Shepherd-of-Your-People," he said. "Tharbis, the daughter of the King of Kush."

You could hear Bint-Anath gasp. Merneptah's jaw dropped. Tiyy bit off an exclamation. Sinuhe's eyes narrowed speculatively. The Pharaoh's face flushed and he leaned forward threateningly.

"Did I not order you to slay that rebel?" he demanded.

"Your orders have been obeyed, O Sword-of-Amon," Moses answered submissively. "All your commands have been obeyed. Kush lies desolate. Her King is slain. But"—he glanced up—"after conquest comes conciliation, O Ruler-of-the-Two-Lands. I have wedded the daughter of the King of Kush. The High-Priest of Amon himself has joined us together. So is justice yoked with mercy and Kush bound to Egypt by kindness. I crave your favour for Tharbis, O Shepherd-of-Your-People."

The Pharaoh leaned back slowly. It was very still. His hooded eyes took in everything about him, the ships on the river, the

crowds packed on either side, the soundless agitation running through the court as the light zephyr runs through corn. It did not require a man as skilled in intrigue as the Pharaoh to sense the suppressed exultation of Tiyy or the stunned amazement of Bint-Anath. The latter rather amused him. For so many years, more years than he wanted to remember, Bint-Anath had had her way about this young man whose adoption, by clever scheming, she had got him to approve without revealing exactly who he was. The young man was a fool, of course. That was now evident. Personable, but a fool. Still it was amusing to realize that Bint-Anath was hoist with her own tackle, so to speak. A wedding in Kush could have been laughed off. But not one at Thebes before the High-Priest of Amon. The young man was a fool. He came to a decision.

"Is this your request of me, Prince Aahmose?"

Moses' fingers tightened around those of Tharbis.

"Yes, O Divinity," he answered.

The Pharaoh stood up. He smiled graciously, holding out his hand.

"Rise up, O daughter of the King of Kush," he said. "Tharbis, the bride of Aahmose, Prince of Egypt, is welcome to our court."

CHAPTER XV

THEY celebrated the victorious return of Moses that night. The great banqueting hall of the palace blazed with light. Light touched the tall ceiling, painted blue, and spangled with silver stars. It blazed back from the golden pillars. It sparkled in the spotless robes and brilliant jewels of the lords and ladies of the court. Amongst them the slaves glided to and fro, serving the ten kinds of meat and the five kinds of fowl and the six kinds of wine and the soft silver of fish and the purple blush of grapes and the red sheen of pomegranates and the pulpy, scarlet-juiced figs. Through the opened windows the night breeze drifted, laden with the scents of honeysuckle and of tamarisk and the bitter sycamore. In the centre space, while music played, the dwarfs clowning and the acrobats and wrestlers showed their cunning.

It was, indeed, a banquet befitting the power of the greatest ruler of his day. There was, however, no trace of pleasure or contentment in the Pharaoh's bearing. Sitting in his golden chair, two Sherden guards behind him, the double crown of Kham gorgeous on his head, he fingered his goblet of lapis lazuli, cunningly inlaid with gold, and viewed the scene from under

half-closed eyelids. Little, in fact, escaped him, either in the body of the hall where the mass of the court was or amongst those who had been honoured with a place at his own table on the dais. Without looking he could sense the sullen resentment of Merneptah, his thirteenth son—pity that Khamwese had had to die, he thought fleetingly—and the taut anger in Bint-Anath's body beside him. But his oblique glance kept travelling to Moses, flushed with wine and the heady liquor of triumph and bending over to Tharbis, obviously oblivious of everything else. Even so, the Pharaoh reflected bitterly, he himself had felt that glorious night after his victory at Kadesh, so many, such interminable years ago. Even so, he had leaned toward that soft-eyed Syrian princess, so rounded her body, so excitingly timid the glances from her eyes. If he could only relive that day, that night. But the sun never retraces its course. That night and that day were dead—long ago—even as she was dead, that princess, Bint-Anath's mother.

Fool, he said to Moses violently in his mind. Fool, do you not know that life is deceitful? Do you not know that when you are young, life whispers to you that life is long and life is pleasant and does nothing to prepare you for the ruthless beat of the wings of Time when you are old? Fool, to think that anything lasts but power.

"Is there anything wrong, Father?" Bint-Anath asked at his side.

The Pharaoh shook his head. His mind was thinking back over his life, remembering again the year when, in the pride and confidence of his young manhood, even as Moses there, he had led his army up through Canaan and Syria to do battle with the Kheta. There at Kadesh, on the Orontes—ah, he could still see and feel that glorious afternoon, the sun hot, the sweat and blood around him, as he drove his chariot again and again into the hosts of the Kheta oblivious to all but the joy of battle, a young god in the morning of the world. Ah, those were the days when everything—wine, women, battle, power—had zest and tang. Now, only power remained.

He nudged his goblet with nervous fingers, staring at it, his frown deep, his lips drooping petulantly. Yet, what was power? Could you eat it? Could you sleep with it? True, he had reigned for two and fifty years. Incontestable that the land and people of Egypt were his to do with as he willed, that he was hailed as the greatest Pharaoh Egypt had ever had, the ruler during whose reign plunder and slaves and tribute had flooded into Egypt. There was luxury, too, luxury such as even Egypt had not known, great palaces, pleasant villas, mighty temples, slaves

without number, objects of art and wares from every land, green gold of Emu and polished jade and gold-mounted whip handles of Canaan and damascened bronzes of Syria and Cyprus, panther and leopard skins and vases of diorite and porphyry and alabaster, so thin the light shone through. Peace, too, the peace he had won for Egypt. It was true that, in these days when the Peoples of the North were pressing hard on the Kheta and on the Islands of the Inland Sea this peace threatened to be precarious. What matter? It would last his time. He was still Rameses the Great, the absolute ruler of the most powerful empire in the world.

But to what avail? Eighteen years ago he had turned from this same thought in passionate revulsion. Eighteen years ago he had rushed into his palace to fling that white-skinned virgin of the Peoples of the North—what was her name?—upon the couch with a savage delight in her tears and cries. Eighteen years back, in his attempt to forget, he had plunged more furiously than before into his orgy of building.

Tonight he could no longer evade the issue. Of what avail was it really that he was Rameses the Great, the Pharaoh who had builded so widely that there was not a city, not a temple in the whole of Egypt or Nubia in which the people did not marvel at his mighty works? Rameses the Great! In spite of all his building, how long would it be before Rameses the Great was but another name mouthed by the lips of priests and himself less than the dust the winds drove over the level plains of the Northland? At one and seventy, he thought despairingly, in spite of all you do to forget it, you must face the fact. At one and seventy, if you do not deafen your ears—and even if you do—you hear the slow, inevitable footfalls of Death.

There was the ringing of despair and of anguished, futile revolt in his mind. His face was sharp and old and bitter. As the music changed he raised his eyes. In the centre space, naked girls, graceful as gazelles, nubile as the thought of love, were swaying, dancing the old, the patterned dances of Egypt. You could see the lust in the faces of his nobles. But of what use were those dancers to him? A great rage surged up in him. "Youth!" he thought savagely. "Youth! I would give all my power for one day—one night—of youth." His fingers closed round his goblet as if he would pick it up and cast it from him.

"What can you be thinking of, Father?" Bint-Anath asked again.

The Pharaoh did not answer. But his eyes were cold as he looked at her. Getting old, he told himself. Yes, in spite of the mask of cosmetics on her face, underneath you could divine the drying skin, the deepening wrinkles. Once again, as often, it

was a source of wonder to him that of all his women, this one daughter of his had almost always succeeded in getting from him what she wanted. He knew why, of course. In this moment, if never before, he was able to analyse it. It was not altogether because she was the feminine counterpart of himself. No, if that mother of hers, that soft-eyed Syrian princess, had not died before he had had his fill of her so that thus she had become the symbol of unreachable desire, the features of Bint-Anath would not be carved on monument after monument beside his own. But her influence over him was waning, he told himself. As for that adopted son of hers . . .

He transferred his gaze to Moses, noting with no touch of human kindness the pouting breasts and graceful body of Tharbis and the way Moses, flushed and eager, looked at her. There was envy in his eyes, envy and hatred for this young man who was on the crest of triumph and hot-blooded youth. Beware, he told Moses silently across the table. Be not too confident. I still have the power. I can end your triumph, if I will. Yes, Aahmose, Prince of Egypt, and son of Amon alone knows whom, I, Rameses, the Great, am still Pharaoh of Egypt.

Bint-Anath was glad that the Pharaoh had transferred his gaze. There had been something menacingly forbidding about his eyes tonight. Really, she reflected, he was becoming more difficult to manage each day, more crotchety, more suspicious. It was a sure sign that age was invading him. Over seventy. People over seventy couldn't live forever. Now, with this triumph in Kush, if Moses had only not made an utter fool of himself . . .

Her thoughts were where they had been ever since the amazing, the shattering announcement, her adopted son had made. She, too, glanced across at Tharbis and her face was abruptly as sharp and old and deadly as it had been, years ago, when she had faced Jochebed on the return from Memphis. That slut! Showing her body so brazenly just because it was young. And Moses enthralled by her. You could see it in every gesture, every look. The fool, the utter fool! By the breasts of Isis, something drastic would have to be done about this Kushite wanton—and done soon. No other woman, she resolved passionately, should have possession of Moses. To sleep with them—yes. But not to be possessed by them. No, by Amon, no!

Two places further along the table Tiyy, the mother of Merneptah, took a handful of nuts from the alabaster dish before her and began to crack them thoughtfully. Tiyy, who compensated for haggard age by an unerring scent for news and scandal and a feeling for the currents of intrigue as sharp as her

nose, had been puzzling all evening about the face which she had seen in the crowd that morning. Her memory did not usually fail her like this. She put a filbert in her mouth and promptly choked on it. That face, she had it now. She spat out the filbert, grinning triumphantly. Jochebed—that was it. Jochebed who had been the Hebrew nurse of Moses and had disappeared ages ago. Now, she asked herself, taking a gulp of wine, why should this Jochebed have been in that crowd? And especially with that look on her face? Yes, especially with that look on her face when she thought no one was observing her?

Tiiy's nose was almost digging into her chin as she considered the vista of possibilities opened up by this occurrence. She took up abstractedly the tiny golden hammer she was using to crack the nuts. They had all supposed, years ago, that Moses was Bint-Anath's own come-by-chance or at best the bastard of one of her friends and that the Pharaoh knew all about it; particularly in view of the decree that no one, on penalty of death, should even hint to Moses that he was not Bint-Anath's own child. But suppose Bint-Anath's reason had been something else? Suppose the Pharaoh himself didn't know who Moses was? It was almost inconceivable. But, just suppose?

She put down the tiny golden hammer carefully since her hand was shaking in excitement. This was worth looking into. Moses had gone ahead too far and too fast, Set damn him. There was, too, the question of the commander for this new and important expedition up to Naharin. Merneptah was going to have that command, if she could get it for him. But Moses, after this triumph in Kush, would, undoubtedly be his competitor. Her son had already been left behind once in charge of the Hebrew slaves at Avaris, while that bastard, Moses, covered himself with glory. That wasn't going to happen again, not if she could prevent it. Even if nothing definite could be discovered, a stink could be raised. Let's see, that Jochebed's husband had been either a jeweller or a goldsmith. It ought not to be too difficult for her steward to do some quiet research in Avaris. She wouldn't say very much to Merneptah. Merneptah, in spite of being her son, was much too stupid and obstinate and lacking in adaptability for intrigue. Superstitious, as well. But if something did come of it . . . just suppose . . . at any rate, it was worth a chance.

Her glance rested balefully on Bint-Anath. Yes, if anything did come of it, she'd balance the reckoning with Bint-Anath.

While these patterns of thought were weaving themselves around Moses' unconscious head in such a way that they could

only be resolved by actions, down in the main body of the hall his friend, Sinuhe, was, without seeming to do so, watching what was going on at the head table. What was worrying his acute mind was the obvious and blissful ignorance of his friend with respect to what was happening around him. It might be true that Sinuhe's admiration and affection for Moses were founded on the presence of those qualities in his friend which he himself lacked, his energy his forthrightness, his instinct for reverence, his inability to impute base motives to those whom he loved or admired. But, as a nude dancing girl, beautifully shaped, flung Sinuhe a rose which he caught gracefully and pressed to his lips, his eyes meeting the girl's own with just the right mixture of irony and admiration and audacity, he was wishing that Moses were more subtle. Couldn't the young idiot realize that to bring Tharbis back with him was like tossing a lump of raw meat before a den of lionesses? Apparently he didn't. Well, it was quite clear that he would have to look after Moses.

CHAPTER XVI

Two hours later, a somewhat irritated Sinuhe was helping a Moses whose potations had been a trifle too exuberant along a corridor of the palace towards the suite of rooms to which Tharbis and Moses had been assigned. In Sinuhe's mind there was a certain regret about the dancing girl. She really had a lovely figure. Her waist and flanks might well have been sculptured by Pentaur himself.

"Don't burst your lungs," he advised Moses, who was singing, most unmelodiously, the song of the teardrop of Mother Isis, which makes the Nile to rise. "You're enough to call the dead back from Yaru."

"Don't be so high and mighty," advised Moses, breaking off his song to slap Sinuhe on the back. "Nights like this don't come every day."

"Fortunately for you."

Moses refused to be cast down. "Did you hear what I called Merneptah?" he wanted to know. He laughed. "Hebrew slave-driver, that's what I called him."

"Just as if Merneptah weren't angry enough with you already, since you got all the glory while he sweated at home," Sinuhe wanted to comment but didn't. He steered Moses away from a huge jar by the wall. A cold voice asked:

"Is that you, Moses?"

Sinuhe and Moses both looked. The Princess Bint-Anath was standing in the corridor waiting for them. There was that in her expression which told Sinuhe that it was time for him to contrive a graceful exit. He managed it cleverly, leaving a somewhat sobered Moses to follow Bint-Anath into her rooms. Seating herself on a couch near the opened window she motioned her adopted son to a chair. It had been her intention to lead up to her purpose subtly. Subtlety, it appeared evident, would be wasted; and, at the same time, a wave of jealous love, mingled with irritated disgust, drove the remnants of caution from her.

"I suppose you're too drunk," she remarked brusquely and without any preliminaries, "to realize what an idiot you've made of yourself?"

There was the little matter of focusing his eyes, Moses found. He shook his head to clear away the fumes of the drink. The Princess misinterpreted the action.

"Your marriage, I mean," she elucidated. "That little barbarian!"

Moses' chin dropped as if on a hinge. "But, Mother," he began to protest.

"Acting as if you didn't know what a woman was like," Bint-Anath swept on relentlessly. "You, who used to have a different slave girl every night and half the ladies of the court as well. What could you have seen in her?"

This would have been difficult to express even if Moses had been entirely sober. How, for instance, can one capture in words the music of the spheres?

"She was so alone," he said haltingly. "Helpless—and yet, so fine, so delicate——"

"Very well, if you wanted to play with her," interrupted Bint-Anath in a tone of disgust. "A concubine? Yes. But to marry her before the High-Priest, to make her your first, your principal wife, the one who will always have the chief authority in your home, no matter how many wives and concubines you have—to lose your head over a shapely body, a—a slut of a Kushite. I suppose she edged you into it. Oh, yes, she knew on which side her cake was buttered—the slut."

The sobering process was getting along rapidly. Moses sat up. "Mother, you mustn't——"

But Bint-Anath was by now beyond control. She had counted on being calm and impartial and charming, on winning Moses over little by little. But anger and an offence to a jealous, all-possessing affection are poor counsellors.

"A slut, I said," she repeated viciously. "And you—giving Merneptah a handle against you at this particular moment."

"Merneptah?"

"Yes. Or hadn't you heard that there was another expedition afoot?" Leaning back, she sneered at her son's sudden and startled interest. "No, I thought not. The son I used to have would have smelled it out before he reached the First Cataract. But not you. Oh no! Too absorbed in the wonder of that precious Tharbis of yours——"

Moses was abruptly on his feet. "Against whom is it directed? Who's to command it?"

"Merneptah—or so he hopes. It's up through Canaan and Syria to Naharin. The Kheta are restless again. The Peoples of the North are pressing on them." She paused looking at Moses. "The man who gets that command," she went on slowly and distinctly, "will be the foremost leader in Egypt—next to the Pharaoh."

His head was entirely clear now.

"Is there a chance for me?" he demanded, his nostrils flaring. "There should be—after my victory in Kush." He came up to her. "Mother, you'll have to help me."

Bint-Anath's eyes were half-closed as she glanced up at him. Yes, in spite of Tharbis, there was still ambition in him. If she played her pieces well . . . Perhaps it would be better to wait. . . . But she couldn't wait, not with this torment within her.


"Before you returned, I had already spoken to the Pharaoh, my father," she said, choosing her words carefully and trying to speak reasonably. "Now, of course, after the idiocy you've displayed——"

"The Pharaoh isn't displeased with me. He has accepted Tharbis."

"You don't know the Pharaoh, my son. When he offered you that gift, everything, anything, was in your grasp. What did you do? You flung it away."

"But——"

"Don't expect the Pharaoh to be grateful further for Kush!" declared the Princess, sitting up, her eyes flashing. "When he offered you that gift, he wiped the record clean so far as he was concerned. In fact, knowing the Pharaoh as I do, I suspect you've dropped several cubits in his estimation. The Pharaoh has little use for fools who know not how to grasp fortune when it is offered them."

Moses sank down on his chair. "But you can placate the Pharaoh, Mother," he pointed out earnestly. "You can persuade him to anything. You know you can." 

She knew that it would be better to leave the words unsaid. They flashed out in spite of her.

"Why should I trouble?"

"Mother!"

Bint-Anath arranged a cushion comfortably. She glanced at a statuette of Mother Isis holding the infant Horus in her arms. The sheen of the soft, subdued light on it was lovely, a part of her mind noticed. She spoke to a point over Moses' left shoulder.

"You seem to forget that I had a marriage arranged for you. Sinuhe's sister. His family is older even than the Pharaoh's. It would have strengthened your position enormously. Now, with that family alienated——"

"Sinuhe isn't alienated."

"Don't be too certain," the Princess flung back at him. "In any case, consider my position. I make arrangements with Sinuhe's family, elaborate arrangements with a view to consolidating your power and my influence, arrangements which were to effect a union between the knot of nobles which have Intef, the Vizier of the Northland as their centre, and my adherents. Both groups of us were looking forward to the day when, in the nature of things, there will be a change in Egypt. You know what I mean.

"All these nuances and subtleties were involved. It was noised abroad. Tiyy and Merneptah and their followers were like rats running around in anxious circles hunting for a way out of a trap. They knew, as everyone else knew, when the report of your success in Kush reached us, that, once the proposed alliance was sealed by your marriage to Sinuhe's sister, I—and you—would control the single most powerful clique in Egypt, one which even the Pharaoh, my father, would hesitate to offend."

Bint-Anath let herself lean back, regarding Moses with scornful eyes. "That was what I was doing while you were in Kush. I waited for your return, proud, hopeful, eager to crown your triumph with a marriage which would have made you unassailable. And then——" She made a nullifying gesture with her shapely hand, the bracelet of rubies and amethysts flashing on her dainty wrist. "I am the butt of laughter, of ridicule. Tomorrow the wandering tellers of tales in the streets of Avaris will tell the story of a Princess and her son and of a shapely barbarian who brought the Princess to the dust."

"I'm sorry, Mother."

"Sorrow doesn't mend broken dykes. I had a palace of power raised and waiting only to be tenanted. Now, the palace is in ruins."

"If there is anything I can do—I mean, I realize that I'm at fault. Even if it wasn't really my fault."

Bint-Anath regarded her adopted son closely, trying to make up her mind to let what she had said have time to sink in and fester, before she went further. Again her emotion overcame her.

"Why then, should I trouble myself with you, you who, by an impetuous, and a—a fly-by-night marriage as if you were a poet or a peasant and not a grandson of the Pharaoh, have cast me down and made me a thing for Tiyy to laugh at?"

"Mother!"

"It's true, isn't it?"

Moses could see that from her point of view his mother spoke what was entirely just; nor was it pleasing to him to think of Tiyy and Merneptah laughing at him and congratulating themselves because he had, by a marriage which was foolish in their eyes and in the eyes of the court, flung away his chances. Back in Kush these things had seemed far away and unimportant. Here, as the influence of the court began to absorb him once more, they began to assume vitality again, to become essential. Yet, on the other side was Tharbis, Tharbis who was the greatest single thing in his life—or so he had felt only this morning. How was he to reconcile the two?

"We can start again," he began haltingly. "If I were to get that command——"

The Princess rose swiftly to her feet. She was a queenly figure in the richly appointed room, the light picking out her clear-cut, imperious face, and the poised line of her neck and shoulders.

"Do you really want that command?"

Moses got up. His nostrils flared wide. "Yes."

"Do you remember how years ago I told you that to achieve power one must be ruthless, that successful ambition must cut its way to its goal relentlessly?"

"Yes, of course. But——"

"Give up Tharbis."

"What!"

"Send her back to Kush. It is easy. She is but a barbarian. Divorce her and send her back. She will be soon forgotten. And then——then——"

"I can't do that, Mother. I can't."

"Why can't you? To win power one must sacrifice. I've made sacrifices, haven't I?"

"Well——"

"I have. I could have lived an easy careless life. I could have had a second marriage. I need not have made enemies of Tiyy and Merneptah. Why did I do these things? Not for myself."

"I know. And I'm grateful."

"Are you? Then give up Tharbis. Marry the sister of Sinuhe. I'll get you this command up to Naharin. I swear it."

"But Tharbis, Mother. I—I love her."

"Love!" the Princess said in deep contempt. She sat down and looked up to him now. "What you mean is that you're fascinated with her body, that, for some reason, she suits you sexually. Well, what is that in comparison with power? Believe me, Moses. One woman is much like another. When Tharbis' fascination for you grows stale, what will you have? Nothing. But power—it remains. It grows. It is always a fresh savour to the nostrils."

"You don't understand, Mother. You can't. Why, the feeling I have for Tharbis——"

"Don't talk like a—like an artist. You've had her. What more do you want?"

"I tell you, Mother——"

"Take another woman. You'll soon find that your wonderful Tharbis isn't so wonderful. In Kush perhaps. But not here. I can point out to you a dozen—a hundred women—here, more beautiful, more skilled in giving pleasure than she. Take Theanu. You remember her? She knows, I'll wager, if you think back, a score of refinements Tharbis never even heard of. I'll send her to your bed."

Moses' face had set in grim lines. "No."

The Princess gasped. She had been so certain that she was winning, that once again, as always in the old days before Tharbis, Moses would give way to her arguments. She rose to her feet again. But this time she wasn't queenly. This time her face and her attitude was that of a shaken woman, of one who is pleading, not believing it possible that she will be cast aside but fearful of the possibility.

"You can't mean that, Moses. Think. I'll get the command to Naharin for you."

"Not at the price of Tharbis."

She took a step towards him. "Haven't I always advised you as to what was best for you? Haven't I always been proved right?"

"Yes. But——"

She walked over to him, putting a hand in his arm, her voice dropping to a whisper. "We've never spoken of this—at least, in words—but it's been implicit in what we've done and planned." She glanced this way and that and bent closer. "If you follow my advice, you'll soon become the most powerful Prince in Egypt. And then, Moses, then—remember, the Pharaoh is old. He has

many sons, that is true. But the double crown of Khan has not always rested on the head of a son of the Pharaoh!"

Moses realized fully what his mother was suggesting. The same thought, even if unexpressed in words, had been in the back of his mind during his triumphal return from Kush. He hesitated.

"Why not Tharbis, too?" he muttered. "Why send her away?"

The Princess let go of his arm impatiently. "Don't be a fool. Have I not already shown you that, in order to effect the combination I've planned, you must marry the sister of Sinuhe—not as a second wife but as your first wife, your consort?"

"Still, even if my marriage to Tharbis has made it more difficult, one might——"

The Princess, losing control of herself, snapped: "That Kushite barbarian—queen of Egypt! Don't be a greater fool than she has made you. Send her back."

Moses' chin went up abruptly. "I won't."

"Moses!"

"No. I love her, I tell you. I love her! To send her back—disowned, dishonoured, the most precious thing in my life. By Set and by Amon it would be despicable, vile. By Set and by Amon, not for Egypt itself will I abandon her."

The Princess recognized finality. For an instant she stood there, the anger within her so violent, the words that rushed to her throat so many and so tumultuous that she could not for the moment find means to express herself.

That inability was indeed, her salvation. It gave her intelligence time to assert itself. She sat down again, slowly, carefully, fighting a battle within herself. Finality, she remembered from long experience, was not always finality, not when the right influences and pressures were brought to bear. A cat could be killed in many more ways than by choking its throat with pitch. To blaze forth in fury at Moses, as every instinct within her clamoured to do? That would be but to cause a direct break between them, a complete alienation. But the girl was in the same house with her and also without friends and influence. One could persecute her in a hundred ways which a man would never notice. One could, also, gradually, put doubt in Moses' mind about her, show him how she was as a chain around hands that reached out for glory, as a hampering fetter about feet which wanted to walk the path of power. Moses, in her estimate, was still ambitious. In her experience, once he had glutted his lust and the novelty had worn off, Tharbis' influence would weaken and his ambition would become again the dominant passion in his being. Well, she must wait for that hour. Her son, clearly, was not weary of Tharbis yet. Wait until he was. Wait until he saw

how Tharbis stood in his path and how helpless he was without herself. Yes, that would be the way of it. She looked up at her son and even managed to dissemble a smile.

"Perhaps, I'm wrong," she said.

Moses heard her. It took an instant for the understanding of what she had said to penetrate. Then, light filled his eyes and a smile of wonder and joy brightened his whole face. He took a step towards her.

"Mother!"

"Yes," she said, letting her eyelids drop while her fingers plucked in seeming nervousness at the threads in her gown. "Possibly, the shock of finding you married—so abruptly—when I'd planned so carefully——"

He came over to her. "Of course, Mother. I understand." He dropped to one knee, and his arm went round her waist. "I ought to have let you know. But it came on me, myself, so suddenly. Nothing like it ever happened to me before. I mean, Mother, that Tharbis——"

Each word was like a knife and she didn't want to hear any more of them. But she continued to dissemble.

"And, perhaps, I was jealous." She looked at him with a tremulous smile. "After all, my son, we've been very—close."

"Oh, Mother." Moses hugged her. "Don't think I haven't appreciated it," he said, releasing her a little and gazing at her fondly. "But this won't make any difference, Mother. Not when you come to know Tharbis."

His fatuousness was, to her, beyond belief. "I don't approve, you know," she remarked with an edge to her voice.

But Moses' relief was too great to pay any heed. He hugged her again, laughing in his joy.

"You will, Mother," he assured her. "Why, when you come to know Tharbis, Mother! She's everything that's fine, Mother, shy, sensitive, eager to learn, pure——"

This was a little too fatuous, even for Bint-Anath's determination to dissemble. Besides she knew that already she had won Moses back, at least as far as was possible until Tharbis was eliminated, as Jochebed, once, had been eliminated. She interrupted her son as he continued with his paean of praise.

"Please, Son, I'm weary."

Moses stopped, a little dashed.

"We'll talk of it tomorrow," she said smiling at him bravely. "When we're more rested. And, when—when I get to know your—wife better."

"Mother, you're—you're lovely."

She bent down and kissed him. "Good night, my son."

"Good night, Mother." Moses gave her a last hug and got up. "And when you get to know her, Mother——"

"I'm sure I will." It was almost unendurable to think of Moses leaving her to sleep with that slut. But she smiled, "Good night, Son."

"Good night, Mother."

He went out the door. Bint-Anath's face changed abruptly. It became cruel and hard. For a moment she reflected scornfully that Moses was singularly trusting and peculiarly unskilled in the real thoughts of women. As if she would lay aside her enmity so easily, or allow herself to rest until this woman who had stolen her son from her was destroyed!

It occurred to her also, as she thought of Moses, that it is the penalty of sacrifice for another person that one puts oneself in thrall to that person. Well, so be it. This young man, though not her son, had become the whole meaning of her life. No one—yes, no one, should come between her and him—no, not even if she had to destroy him and herself. Let him have his Tharbis—tonight. There were other nights.

Her eyes narrowed as, deliberately putting Moses out of her mind, she leaned back to ponder her campaign against Tharbis. The women of the court? Well, so far as they were concerned, she would seem to approve of her son's marriage. She would go about approving—but letting drop a hint or two here and there, phrased in poisonous kindness, not to expect too much at first. Not the girl's fault. But, after all, up in Kush, you know——

Yes, that would be the way. As for Tharbis herself—be very sweet, at first, sweet with just the proper amount of patronizing. Give her the right advice in such a way that the girl, in resentment, would inevitably do exactly the opposite. Then, begin to show her own claws, put Tharbis in the wrong, herself always in the right, and point it out, deprecatingly, to Moses. Start to drive a wedge between them, suggest doubts. Meantime, study the girl. Find out her weaknesses. Men, now—Bint-Anath, herself a cynic, felt, as she remembered the glances Tharbis had cast about her at the banquet, that possibly, she had hit on something. Pure, was she?

The Princess told herself with a sneer that that little lady, if she was any judge, knew her way around. Moreover, a girl who was so vain of her appearance and paid so much attention to beautifying herself was, undoubtedly, conscious of men. It was likely, therefore, that she could be caught by flattery, and Moses, if he was as fascinated by this Tharbis as he seemed to be, would, likewise, be jealous and possessive. If one could, therefore, sully the purity in which he believed? Merneptah, now.

Bint-Anath shifted her position and there was a frown of concentration on her forehead as she began to wonder if she could get two geese with one throwing stick. Merneptah and Tiyy, in order to annoy her, might very well make much of the girl. And Merneptah had an eye for a pretty body—while Moses hated Merneptah. Yes, something might be worked there. Tomorrow, she would start to investigate.

The Princess got up and walked over to the window. For a moment she stood there motionless, smelling the scent of blossoms, staring out into the trees and the shrubs, black and still under the stars. Down on the river a boat was drifting by, its lights flickering like fireflies through the trees.

It was a perfect night, a night for love. And she was alone. And Moses slept with that Kushite wanton, the Moses to whom she had dedicated her life, forgetting all about her who had done so much for him.

The Princess turned from the window and abruptly her face was a mask of fury. If all that she had planned failed, she told herself fiercely, her hands clenching, there was still a way. There was the knife—or poison.

Moses had been very worried and anxious during his interview with his mother, in part because he had been compelled to understand clearly the possible consequences of his impetuous marriage, but chiefly because it had seemed for a moment or two that there would be a definite break over Tharbis between himself and the mother on whom he leaned more heavily than he himself realized. Now, however, as he walked down the corridor towards his own rooms, he was pathetically confident that everything was all right and that within a few days his wife and his mother would be entirely reconciled to each other. He was, actually, innocent enough to take Bint-Anath's change in attitude at face value. Women, he would have told you largely, are annoyed by pin-pricks and are affected by unimportant things, such as clothes and other women and babies and bits of gossip. But this was nothing for men to worry about. One ought to listen to them in the same spirit in which one watched kittens at play. There would be a scratch or two, perhaps. But nothing serious. Just keep one's temper and everything turned out all right—even with his mother, the Princess.

True, it was unfortunate that his marriage had so evidently put difficulties into his path. His steps grew slower and more thoughtful as he considered that point. He hadn't realized fully up in Kush just what complications marriage with Tharbis would create. If he had—perhaps—

But he put away the unfinished thoughts as treason before it could find definite expression in his brain. Besides he was at the entrance to his suite of rooms and, as he came to the entrance, there rose in him the thrill of excitement, of desire which the thought of Tharbis always awakened in him. His steps quickened. Bint-Anath and her warnings went out of his mind.

He found her in the room. The heat had made her toss the coverlet from her. But the light from the tall stone lamp by the window was tender on her. Lying there, asleep, her head pillowed on an outflung arm, the pure lines of breast and flanks and rounded thighs and the outswell of her hips as clear and delicate as a ripple curving in upon some moonlight beach, she was to him a poem of sheerest desire, a peal of music sounding down the corridor of some changeless, enchanted palace. He sat down on the couch beside her as one kneels in some quiet, mystic temple. Her eyes opened. She turned her head.

"You were a long time," she murmured sleepily.

"I couldn't leave the banquet for a while, dearest," he said softly, smiling at her and putting a careful, tender arm under her shoulders so as to lift the upper part of her body against him. "Then, my mother wanted to talk to me."

There was an instant awakening in the body within the circle of his arms.

"I hadn't really seen her, you know," he felt impelled to explain, though he did not know why. "It was natural that she should want to talk to me."

"What did she say?"

This, of course, was exactly what Moses could not tell her. Tharbis listened to his blundering attempts at evasion. There had only been a few casual words between her and Bint-Anath, the carefully polite words of women when they know they aren't going to like each other and walk delicately around the mutual antagonism. But there had been quite enough to tell Tharbis, who, in her own way was as clever and as devious as Bint-Anath (except that her actions were based on intuition and instinct), that in Bint-Anath she had a dangerous antagonist. Her instinct had also told her the reason, and that same instinct informed her that in a battle between two women over the same rather stupid and forthright man, there would be no mercy shown. As Moses blundered on, her sense of danger became acute. She used the weapons she knew. Twisting around, she threw her arms about Moses.

"You won't send me away, will you?" she cried.

"Why, darling! Whatever gave you the idea——"

"Promise," she begged, pressing her nude body against him.

"Of course, I promise. Of course. But why——"

Her lips sought his. Her body was soft and melting against him. Desire swept up in him. His arms tightened around her. He forgot his question. He forgot all except that this was his wife who wanted him, whom he wanted. He crushed her lips beneath his.

Later, however, before he went to sleep, Moses puzzled a little. It seemed uncanny to him that, without his saying a word, Tharbis should have divined what his mother, the Princess, had demanded. Of course, it was absurd. His mother hadn't really meant it. But it made him wonder uneasily just what did go on in women's minds. It had never seemed important to him before. Why, he wondered in vexation, couldn't women be straightforward? Why did they have to walk around a subject, pretending it wasn't there and that they weren't interested in the slightest and then pounce, like a cat jumping on a mouse? Even Tharbis seemed to act that way.

He turned his head cautiously. Tharbis was lying, curled up, her head in the hollow of his shoulder. He could smell the perfume of her, feel her warm against him. A flood of tenderness invaded him. Alone, tired. No, Tharbis was different. Tharbis was perfection, femininity itself, the sound of music over water, the moon, silver and mysterious over the quiet plains and the level sea. And Tharbis was entirely his. Tharbis loved him. Tharbis, so pure, so delicate and yet so eagerly passionate, so desirable and dainty in her eagerness. His arm tightened around her carefully.

And, meanwhile, Tharbis lying in that comfortable half-dreamy state before sleep overtakes one, was reflecting that she didn't need to fear Bint-Anath too much. Moses was easy, laughably easy to influence, in fact, too easy. Yes, she could do what she liked with Moses. And, once she got Bint-Anath's goose settled, she was going to like it here in Egypt. Egyptian men, after all, weren't very different from Kushite men. How they had looked at her! She had felt their eyes hot upon her. Yes, she had made them look. That Merneptah, too. Yes, the white and red had been a good choice. It did show off her figure. Yes, it had been a success. The women, of course. But then, women couldn't see a beautiful girl without sniffing up their noses at her. The way they sniffed showed that the dress had been a success. Bint-Anath—she didn't like that woman. Wanting Moses to herself. Well, she wouldn't have him, not a bit of him. And Moses was nice, too. Of course, one couldn't help feeling a little scornful towards him, ready to believe anything she told him, treating her as if she were a fragile vase. There

had been a certain amount of excitement when she hadn't been sure whether he would marry her or not. Now, however, she was sure of him. That Merneptah, though. He looked a little like Tebu. Tebu had known what a woman needed. Tebu had been brutal at times. You had never been able to be sure of Tebu; or sure of what he would do to you, either, if you overstepped the mark, just to see. Now, if this Merneptah were like Tebu. And Merneptah had looked at her, really looked at her. You could tell he knew about women. It gave her a little thrill to think of it. Still, Moses was sweet, really sweet. Quite important, too, to judge by all the fuss everybody had made over him today. No, Bint-Anath wasn't going to get him back. Not if she knew it. She cuddled up to Moses.

CHAPTER XVII

STILLNESS enfolded the palace of the Pharaoh and those within it. Outside the stars stared down. With impressive detachment they viewed the palace of the Pharaoh and the river flowing soundlessly past it and the city of Avaris, black under the quiet night, and, close by the city, in the dense reeds along the river, the barracks of the Hebrew slaves. It did not affect the stars that, while Moses slept soft in a room open to the night breeze, his fellow Hebrews were sleeping the sleep of exhaustion in narrow, windowless cells, men and women tumbled together, like fish in the hollow of a net. The thick heat and miasma of the river weighed heavy in those cells. They stank with the smell of unwashed, sweating humanity. As Nun, who could not sleep, told himself, it was a stable for cattle, not for men. Yet neither the gods of Egypt nor Yahweh seemed to care.

He twisted around in his corner. He thought of the new wife, whom, tired of his loneliness, he had finally married, back there in Goshen. She was pregnant now. This was his first night in the barracks, since he had come in during the morning with a fresh levy from Goshen. By the time his two months were over, he reflected—if they let him go after two months—the child ought to be born. It was, indeed, incomprehensible to him why he should ever have allowed himself to have a child, knowing the sort of life that child would have. He cursed himself under his breath. Loneliness and desire, even amidst misery, for a little human warmth and comfort betrayed a man's intelligence. For what hope was there for the Hebrews? The answer, as always, was: "None." There was no pleasure in this case in being an

accurate prophet. Nevertheless, his predictions were coming true. The Hebrews were disintegrating. They had sunk to the level into which they had been thrust so that now they neither expected anything better nor, what was worse, felt the need of anything better. They accepted their lot apathetically.

Of course, one couldn't blame them, Nun observed to himself, drawing the thick, rank air into his lungs distastefully. The older men were dying off. In the twenty-five years since the coming of the oppression a new generation had sprung up, a generation who had either been born in captivity or else whose memories of the old days were so vague that they lacked reality. For them, the only life they knew was the one they now lived, labouring as herdsmen and farmers in Goshen, being driven away like animals at stated intervals to work on the buildings of the Pharaoh. And they were animals, he thought savagely. You could see it—the way they cringed to the whip, their apathy a few hours back when the guards had come in and dragged out the women they wanted for the night, their cunning attempts to avoid as much work as they could, their pre-occupation with their sole interests, food and rest and escaping punishment and hasty, coarsely snatched sex. Where was the ancient Hebrew preoccupation with art and literature and beautiful surroundings and abstruse speculations and religion, yes, even religion? Gone with the lash, as one might say. Amram had been wrong and he, Nun, the physician, right. The Hebrews had become slaves, not only externally but, where it mattered, inside themselves.

It was a bitter pleasure to have been right. It might, indeed, be pointed out that some of the Hebrews had escaped the oppression, either by bribery or by the help of powerful friends or by losing themselves amongst the huge mass of Asiatics in Egypt. They, too, however, were lost as Hebrews. Except Aaron. To do Aaron justice, he was more Hebrew than the Hebrews.

Nun thought a little about Aaron and his secret organization and it occurred to him that in a way its existence gave the lie to his conclusions. Yet, what really had Aaron's organization achieved? In a few special cases, help and deliverance. But, for the main mass, nothing. What could be done for the main mass except to try revolt? Revolt would mean disaster. No, Aaron's organization was merely a sporadic thing, a futile slave group, not really affecting the issue. The Hebrews were lost—short of Amram's miraculous Deliverer—the Deliverer, who, Amram had used to hint, might be Moses.

Nun's lips curled into a sneer. Moses, the Deliverer? What an absurdity! That young man was now firmly established as a Prince of Egypt, an Egyptian of the Egyptians. How could he be

anything else? He recalled what was known among the Hebrews of Moses: his campaigns, his quarrels with Merneptah, his recent victory in Kush. The Hebrews, indeed, had a sort of proprietary interest in Moses, since the legend—and, in reality, it had taken on the proportions and unreality of a legend—that this Egyptian Prince was one of themselves was widely spread amongst them. It came into Nun's mind that there was one thing he had omitted in reflecting on the status of the Hebrews, the amazing solidarity of slaves and their equally amazing knowledge of the inner life and secrets of their masters. How surprised the Egyptians would be, he thought grimly, if they knew just what was whispered among the slaves they despised. It was a sorry triumph—but a triumph, just the same. Yes, in a way, a miserable way, Amram was right. Oppression had welded the Hebrews together. In a way it was making them into a race, a race which was conscious of itself as an entity separate from the Egyptians whom they had used to ape, from all other peoples. But what a race! A race doomed to slavery.

Had Nun been able to see into a room in the Street of the Dog in Avaris, he might not have been quite so confident in his predictions. In that room, one immediately behind the rather elaborate shop which occupied the front of the house, Aaron was conferring with two of his secret organization who, at considerable risk to themselves, had managed to slip away from the barracks for an hour or so and to climb the half-finished walls of Avaris. Both of them were young men and the deferential way in which they addressed Aaron would have been amazing to the Princess Tiyy, for instance, or, for that matter, to anyone who knew him in his ordinary life. In ordinary life one saw an obsequious merchant, so obsequious, indeed, as to look as if he were perpetually bent double. Tonight, however, there was no mask over the shrewdness and decision in Aaron's face.

"No, it isn't possible," he said.

"Why?" demanded the younger of the two men. "I tell you this Azkim is more brutal than any overseer in Goshen. We're used to the whip. But this man takes pleasure in torture. He laughs."

"There's the question of the women, too," observed the other man. "Tonight, my sister was amongst those they hauled away. Azkim and his guards do what they like with them. I tell you," he added savagely, "death is too good for him."

Aaron shook his head. "We are too close to the Pharaoh," he pointed out. "Were it in Goshen—yes. To kill Azkim here, however, could not pass unnoticed. No, Jonathan, and you, Joram, do you not remember what happened to the Hebrews five

years ago, when Baasha killed the governor of Bubastis? Better that one—or a hundred—should suffer than that that should happen again. No, it isn't practical."

"There are times when you are too practical," Jonathan muttered.

Aaron regarded him coldly. "We are too weak to be anything but practical," he reminded him. "You don't expect to stand up to the Pharaoh's soldiers, do you?"

"No."

"Well, then, use your brains. Strike a blow here and a blow there but under such circumstances that no one can be sure it is a blow and not an accident. Start small and grow large. Make ourselves ready. Endure—but be ready."

"Ready for what?" growled Joram.

"You ask that? You, a Hebrew? For the day of deliverance!"

"It is long in coming."

Aaron paced to the end of the room, realizing as he did so how luxurious and magnificent the thick rugs and rich tapestries must seem to these ragged, smelly followers of his, accustomed as they were to huts in Goshen or to the barrack cells at Avaris. At the same time he was aware that these surroundings overawed them and gave him prestige. He came back to stop in front of them.

"You know that I do not speak to you as my father did," he said impressively. "He spoke to you of Yahweh. He bade you have faith in Yahweh and in some heaven-sent Deliverer. Well, I am not like my father. I am, as you have said, practical. A man has his brain and his hands. It is, in my opinion, his own fault if he cannot correlate the two so that thought issues into action. There are now a thousand of us sworn together in blood brotherhood against the Egyptian oppressors. Granted we have not achieved as much as we would wish. But we have done something. Let us not allow emotion to outstrip our intelligence. Let us be satisfied with what our brain tells us it is possible for our hands to do."

"But the final issue?" asked Jonathan.

"In the final issue we, too, must have faith," Aaron flung back at him. "I do not say faith in Yahweh. I say faith that in the shifting and unpredictable course of human events the turning wheel of chance will, at last, bring our opportunity uppermost. The Pharaoh is old. When he dies his sons and grandsons will be battling for the throne. That is one chance. There is another. My ships' captains tell me that the People of the North are starting to press southward once more. The Kheta are already in difficulties. So is the coastline of Asia and the empire of

Mycenae. The isles of the Inland Sea are disturbed. A band of these savages, I am told, have even landed in Libya, on the borders of Egypt. As I see it—though the Egyptians do not—the world that Egypt has known is, as it was in the days of the Hyksos, in the process of dissolution. In that confusion our opportunity will arrive. Till then, our duty is to make ourselves ready.”

“We will,” Joram declared fervently. “Yes, Aaron, we will.”

“And, in the meantime, report to me everything that happens,” Aaron said. “Knowledge, as you know, is power. Is that agreed?”

“It is agreed,” Jonathan said.

When the men had gone, Aaron wandered about aimlessly, picking up an object here, an object there. This venture of setting up a second shop in Avaris had, he reflected, already proved itself. So had the shipping business in which he had now stepped. Yes, if he watched cautiously and made no mistakes, he would soon be on the way to becoming the richest merchant in all the Northland. Even now, who would recognize in Hadad, the Syrian, with shops in Tanis and Avaris and ships going out to Cyprus and Canaan and Phoenicia, the Aaron who had skunk through the streets of Memphis? Who, for that matter, would be likely, by the wildest stretch of imagination, to connect him with the man who was the head of the secret organization among the Hebrews?

Yet he must be cautious, he reminded himself. He had more to lose now, too much to lose. Back in the old days at Tanis, it had not seemed so important. He had had the fire and recklessness of youth in him. But now there were his shops and his wife, Elisheba, and his family. Not that he had any intention of deserting the cause of the Hebrews! Aaron put down a statuette with a thump. Miriam had no right to say that to him. Just because, on the way back from the landing place, he had cautioned her for starting to talk about Moses. As if his father wasn't enough to manage without Miriam putting in her stinging remarks . . .

The matter which had been in the back of Aaron's mind had now been brought to the fore. The sight of Moses had not interested Aaron greatly. But when, on their return, Jochebed had, as was natural, related it all eagerly to Amram, stressing in her excitement their son's magnificence and power, this, in some fashion inexplicable to Aaron, had seemed to his father the final proof of Yahweh's purpose, the final coping stone to his belief that his son, Moses, was to be the Deliverer of the Hebrews. It had put the old man, indeed, into a state of exaltation. They had not been able to get him quieted. He seemed to think that

he saw things which they could not see and to want to convince his wife and his children of the reality of what he saw.

Absurd, Aaron told himself now in vexation. What was there for a man to see except what he could grasp with his five senses. He turned towards the stairs as if to go up to Elisheba, his wife. But an inner impulse, stronger than his practicality, caused him to hesitate and to make his way, finally, to the room in the back in which his father lay. They were as he had left them when Joram and Jonathan had come. Miriam was standing by the wall, her gaunt face bitter and sulky. His mother was sitting by the bed and Aaron could appreciate the weariness of the lines on her strong, patient face. On the bed his father was lying, combing his long white beard with frail, trembling fingers, his pale face on which the blue veins stood out, rapt and exalted as he talked, a man, Aaron thought with a certain annoyance, to whom the real and the visible were unimportant and the illusory all in all.

"My son, the Deliverer," he was declaring now fervently. "Aye, the day is coming. Have I not said that Yahweh hath some great purpose in mind for Moses, my son? Have I not always said so, Jochebed?"

"Yes, Amram," Jochebed said soothingly, as she had been doing for the past few hours.

"In his own good time, I said. Aye, the ways of Yahweh are mysterious ways. Behold how He hath prepared my son. He hath become a leader, a captain of men, against the day when Yahweh shall reveal His purpose to him. Our son, Jochebed! Our son, the Deliverer to lead our people out of Egypt. And so shall our people praise Yahweh, their God. Our son, Moses, the Deliverer!"

Aaron shrugged his shoulders almost imperceptibly, content to let it pass if it made the old man happy. To Miriam, however, this was, at last, too much. Ever since noon she had been listening to her father rave. It was impossible for her to understand her mother allowing the old man to ramble on so absurdly, and doing nothing to check him. He ought to be brought down to earth. She said abruptly:

"Moses, a Deliverer? A man who thinks himself a Prince of Egypt? A man who has taken a Kushite woman? Why deceive yourself, Father? Moses will never lead the Hebrews out of Egypt."

Amram twisted his head around painfully so that he could look at her. "You must have faith, daughter," he said, scolding her gently. "All things are possible to Yahweh."

"And, meanwhile, He lets His people suffer. What kind of a God is that?"

Her father's face flushed a little. "You are imprisoned by the present, daughter," he told her. "Have I not told you, time and time again, that the present is but a needle point of time? In the very act of existing, it becomes part of the unimagined procession of the past, which, in turn, gives birth to the unguessed at length of the future. Viewed in this light the present sufferings of our people are not important. Yahweh is not impatient. In His own good time, when He hath schooled His people by suffering, He will lead them out of Egypt to the place He hath prepared for them. I tell you I can see it. Yea, I can behold it—our people being led out of bondage. Have faith in Yahweh, Miriam."

Jochebed looked at her daughter warningly and put a finger to her lips. Aaron hoped that she would say nothing further. But Miriam's patience had reached the edge of the precipice and jumped over.

"'Have faith in Yahweh!'" she burst out, her gaunt face intense, her thin form thrust forward. "'In His own good time'? How many times have I heard that! What has it brought our people? Where was Yahweh when five years ago, the Sherden were let loose on Goshen? You know the things, the terrible things which happened. Whole villages flung into the flames. Men hung up by their genitals, head downward——"

"Hush, Miriam!" exclaimed Jochebed, getting up.

"No, Mother, I won't hush," Miriam told her. "It's time he heard these things, realized these things. The sufferings of our people are not important, he says. What of the impalements, the roastings over slow fires, the tortures of women dangling by their breasts, the—the other things, too horrible to talk about, except in the dark and then only in whispers. Yahweh! What did He do? Nothing! Would that Yahweh would go to some other people!"

"Blasphemy!" Amram cried, trying to struggle up to a sitting posture. "Blasphemy! Beware, Miriam, lest Yahweh——"

He collapsed suddenly, falling back on the pillows, gasping heavily for breath, his eyes turning upward. With a wordless cry Jochebed leaned over hastily to give succour to him.

"You shouldn't have, really," Aaron said to his sister. "What good does it do?"

"It's time," Miriam said sombrely, making no move to help her father. "Time somebody told him. Talking of Moses. Always, Moses. You, Aaron, even if you are as cold-blooded as a fish, you're ten times the man Moses is. Moses, a Deliverer. Faugh!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE man impaled on the sharpened stake screamed again. On the road to the north of the brick pits a courier in a striped headdress turned to look. Out on the blue sea beyond, the oars of a pleasure skiff, skirting the coast, paused for a held instant before they dipped. As the sound died away in a horrible bubbling gasp, Azkim, the head overseer, glanced up at the man. Good for a few hours yet, he thought casually.

"Get a move on, you offscourings of camels," he shouted mechanically at his overseers. "You, Senkuwere, and you, Inmet. Drive the sons of Set. Make 'em hump."

The effect was like that of a horse jogging along lazily when you suddenly bring down the lash. You could see the momentary burst of added nervous activity. The whips hissed. The Hebrews stumbled into desperate activity. Azkim yawned and placed his broad rump on a pile of bricks, so arranged as to make a chair. By the ram of Mendes, it was hot, he told himself, brushing the hand with the whip in it across his forehead. He glanced at the pits again. That girl, third from the end in the fourth row, had a nice pair of breasts. He must remember to tell Senkuwere to bring her over tonight. Only good thing about this job was that you could do what you liked to the whole caboodle of them and nobody cared. Prince Merneptah certainly didn't care. Not so long as you got the work done.

Above his head the man's screams shrilled out. Azkim leaned his burly, barrel-chested form back against the pile of bricks and let his eyes rove over the scene with the complete indifference of a man who has seen it too many times. Behind him was the road and the sea. Inland were the level reaches of the Northland, hotly green in the sun.

To his right could be seen the walls of Avaris, the gold-capped obelisks of the great temple of Amon glittering above them. Upstream wound the line of trees which marked the course of the river and amongst them, a half-mile along, you could discern the roof of the Pharaoh's palace. Azkim's glance fastened on it, thinking of some of the women he had watched coming out of that palace. Not much use to the Pharaoh, either. Not at his age. Azkim licked his coarse lips. If he were the Pharaoh. But, no. Overseers like him had to make out with these Hebrew wenches. He put a finger to the side of one nostril and blew violently.

"Get a move on," he shouted automatically. "Make 'em sweat."

The scream was a horrible, inhuman sound above his head. Azkim yawned again, lazily. In the brick pits and in the two lines of carriers moving back and forth between the pits and the fort which was being built on the promontory overhanging the road, no one stopped for so much as a look at the impaled man. For that matter, Nun told himself bitterly, as his fingers, once so soft and sensitive, dug into the clay, we haven't time to look or feel sorry. Not one of us. He risked a cursory glance at his companions, stripped to the waist, men and women both. Like himself they were scrabbling at the sticky clay, mixing it in the mould with chaff and bits of straw, setting the bricks out to dry in the hot sun, striving desperately to complete the tally demanded of them and always one brick behind, scarcely noticing the curling sting of the whip or the hoarse shouts of the overseers. The sweat glistened on their naked bodies. Their eyes were blank and hopeless. They were dumbly grateful with, Nun reflected fleetingly and satirically as he dumped a blob of clay into the mould and patted it down, an animal's gratefulness for the occasional whiff of a breeze from the sea, and they showed, too, the animal's instinctive, cringing reaction to the lash. Sorry for Simeon! They hadn't time or spirit or energy to be sorry for themselves.

The scream was in his ears, piercing, inhuman. His whole being shuddered away from it. It wasn't so much the screams that shattered one, he commented to himself, trying to be detached and philosophic, as their maddening regularity, like watching water drop on a stone. One could count the seconds. One waited, quivering, intense. Yet one's mind told one that to be sorry for Simeon was wasted emotion. Simeon couldn't possibly have any human consciousness left, not after the tortures of last night and the impalement early this morning; the impalement Azkim had made the Hebrews watch. Besides, such things happened. Simeon had been very foolish yesterday. It had been very foolish of him to strike Senkuwere, the overseer. True, Senkuwere had been beating Simeon's father to death because the old man, overcome by the heat, had fallen away from his task. Yet Simeon hadn't helped the old man. Instead, lying huddled in their cells in the barracks, they had been forced, all of them, to listen to Simeon's screams all night long, disturbing their sleep.

Nun's lips curled. Twenty-five years ago it had been different. Twenty-five years ago, they had fought back. Yes, he himself had fought back until he was struck down. Yet what had that resistance brought him or the Hebrews? What would resistance

bring now? Slaves cannot conquer their masters. No, if Simeon had only been sensible yesterday, as he, Nun, was being sensible . . .

The scream was bubbling out. In spite of himself Nun's body was jerked upright. He did not see the road or the blue sea beyond. His whole soul was staring at Simeon, Simeon nakedly obscene upon his stake like a frog stuck by boys on a copper nail, Simeon in long, slow, filthy agony until his struggles forced the stake up into a vital spot. By Yahweh, they might at least kill him decently. He took a stumbling step forward. By Yahweh . . .

The shout of the overseer and the stinging cut of the whip brought him back to his senses. He crouched back to his work hurriedly, conscious that none of his fellow Hebrews had spared him so much as a glance. The sweat ran into his eyes and he could not take time to brush it off. If he could only stop his thoughts. If he could only be like the others, blank, uncaring, absorbed only in avoiding the lash. And, of course, they were right. Resistance or protest only brought more suffering. Even yet one shuddered to remember what had happened throughout Goshen five years ago. He had been here almost three weeks now. Three weeks of the pit. Three weeks of the lash and watching rape and doing nothing about it; of seeing men and women kicked and beaten.

But to resist was useless. It was better not to hope, not to care, not to think. Why sneer at his people for being like beasts? Anyway, in what respect was he, Nun, the physician, better than they? By Yahweh, Jabal, his friend, was a better man than he! Jabal, at least, had slain his half-dozen Egyptians before he died. Simeon, too, Simeon who . . .

The red weal of the scar across his cheek was throbbing. With a strong effort Nun checked his line of thought and blocked off Simeon's scream. For a moment or two he tried to work so desperately that he could not think. But his mind refused to be stilled. Equally desperately he tried to guide it away from Simeon. He thought of his child who would soon be born; of Intef, his old friend, the Vizier of the Northland; of Amram; of a picture of his old home in Memphis; and of Ruth, his dead wife, and himself walking in the garden as evening came. . . .

It was of no avail. The screams of Simeon had broken their monotonous regularity. They were coming one on top of the other and there was a new quality in them. Nun tried to keep his head down. He could not. The screams shattered him, merging with the red waves of heat in his brain. He looked up. Azkim, the head overseer, grinning, had hold of the sharpened

stake and was shaking it. Nun's lips drew back from his teeth. By Yahweh, was he a man or not? By Yahweh, was he to stand here, he, Nun, the physician, whose wife had been raped to death in a street of Memphis, and do nothing? Simeon, his own sister's son. By Yahweh . . .

To his intense surprise, Nun found that he was no longer asking these questions of himself. He was shouting them at Inmet, the overseer. It was, in a way, amusing, and, as he shouted, he noticed—and was proud of himself for noticing—that in this moment of acute upheaval, events which ordinarily would have happened in swift sequence seemed to be proceeding at a far slower tempo so that he could mark the exact instant when the look of incredulous surprise on Inmet's face was succeeded by a savage grin as the whip lash went up in a wide, sweeping arc. But the whip lash never fell. For Nun, the physician, had noticed something else; the dagger at the overseer's belt. As he noticed this, the face of Ruth, his dead wife, seemed to flash before him and to be succeeded by the fierce and scowling visage of Jabal; Jabal, who had slain a half-dozen Egyptians before he died. Nun's reaction was instantaneous. Still with that sense of slow, suspended motion, he was on the overseer, hurling him back and snatching the dagger from his belt; and Nun, the physician, knew just where he would strike. I will never see my son now, he thought in surprise as he flung up his hand. It was with a feeling of intense amazement that he realized his uplifted hand had been seized from behind. He strove to wrench it free. But the guard held him. He heard Simeon's scream. Not that, he thought in sudden frenzy. Anything but that. And broke free for a split second and tried to turn the dagger against himself.

He was seized before he could plunge it home. The guards flung him down, beating his lean, writhing body, kicking it, stamping on it. None of his fellow Hebrews helped him. They cowered away, digging in at their work with frightened energy, casting quick sideways glances at him. Then, almost senseless, his legs dragging behind him, he was pulled from the pits over to the road where Azkim waited. They set him up on his feet. They propped him there, twisting his arms behind his back. The blood streamed over his face and he could not brush it off. Worse than that, worse than the agony where they had kicked him, were the screams of Simeon above his head. "Not that, O Lord," he prayed incoherently. "Anything but that." Azkim was smiling, a cruel, expectant smile. He cracked his whip and the smile on his thick, brutal lips became a grin.

"So you're playful, dog," he drawled. "Well, we'll give you a chance to play."

Simeon's screams forced it out of Nun. "Mercy," he babbled, trying to drop to his knees. "Not that. Mercy!"

The guards jerked him upright. Azkim was still grinning, his thick neck thrust a little forward. So intent was he that neither he nor any of the guards saw the slow-stepping chariot which had just come round the promontory to the east, and they would have paid no attention to it if they had.

"Mercy?" Azkim repeated slowly. "By the crocodiles of Set, we'll be merciful, Hebrew. We might kill you at once. But we're too tender-hearted, aren't we, boys? Just like gazelles. Thus we are. No, we'll let you live a while." He looked at the grinning group of guards and overseers. "You, Senmut, and you, Kharti, go sharpen a stake. But not too sharp."

So it was going to happen to him, to him, Nun, the physician, who, years ago in Memphis, had tended the sick women and children of the court. Nun sucked in his breath. He heard Azkim say: "Peg him out, you two." And then he heard Simeon's bubbling scream and the sound of the axe on wood and the jingle of harness, all muddled in a crazy confusion within his spinning brain. With a wild, inarticulate cry, he jerked desperately in an effort to break away, the muscles of his lean body straining, his breath coming in gasps. The guards seemed to find amusement in the futility of it. They let him drag them along a step or two, laughing hugely and Azkim flung back his head and bellowed. There was a sudden clatter of hoofs and a voice cut into the tumult, speaking harshly, imperiously:

"What's happening here?" the voice demanded.

It was a miracle. The guards stopped laughing. Azkim had stopped laughing, too. Nun, pausing in his struggles, heard Azkim say:

"Nothing, my lord. A Hebrew dog. That's all."

Nun twisted his head around. There, on the road above him, proud and calm, but frowning a little under the circlet with the serpent's head, a face looked down at him. Nun didn't see the other man in the chariot. All he saw was that imperious face and something in that face, something not quite so aloof, so uncaring as the faces of Egyptian nobles always were. He wanted to speak, to cry out for mercy, for a quick death. Something in that face and something within himself restrained him. He waited, his head twisted round, his eyes desperate, his chest heaving.

"What has he done?" the face asked.

Nun could not see him. But he knew that Azkim had shrugged his shoulders, and when he answered one could sense the trace of insolence in his voice.

"What is it to you, my lord? He is Hebrew. I hold command here."

Back in the pits the Hebrews had paused to watch. Nun saw the face in the chariot flush. The hand with the whip tensed.

"Dog, do you know who I am?" the face roared at Azkim. "I am Prince Aahmose, grandson to the Pharaoh."

It was like a physical blow to Nun, the sudden realization. Aahmose, Prince of Egypt! Moses, son of Amram! He heard Azkim's: "Pardon, my lord, pardon." He felt his guards seeming to flinch, loosening their hold. With a determined thrust of his body, he dragged himself and them round so that they all faced the road. His glance took in the other man in the chariot and the white horses, tossing their plumed headdresses and champing at their bits. But his eyes returned to the proud, stalwart figure planted sturdily in the chariot, and to the vivid, imperious face. So this was Moses, son of Amram. No, he remembered, straightening himself, not Moses but Aahmose, Prince of Egypt. Yet surely there was something of Amram in that face. Surely...

On his side Moses stared down at him, wondering again why the mere fact that the man was a Hebrew should disturb him so. Slaves of other races? One passed them by without caring what happened to them. But one was always searching the faces of Hebrews, striving to see some kinship to Aunt Jochebed, to Uncle Amram. Not that one could see much kinship here. The man looked like an animal, a wretched beaten animal. With an impatient sigh Moses turned to glance carelessly at the half-naked men and women staring at him from the pits and from the two lines of carriers. At that moment Simeon screamed. Moses' head jerked round. He saw the gaping vent of the mouth, the body tense and struggling. Then the head fell, lolling to one side and the limbs relaxed. There was an expression of distaste on Moses' face as he turned to Azkim. A quick death—yes. But, somehow, he had never been able to stomach torture, even though he knew it was both foolish and squeamish of him.

"Well, tell me what happened?" he demanded abruptly.

Azkim explained eagerly. Moses listened.

"Attacking an overseer, eh?" he observed meditatively. He thought for a moment. The sensible thing to do was to shrug his shoulders and pass on. He was certain that Sinuhe felt that it was none of their business. As for himself, ever since he had been old enough to notice he had been accustomed to human life being too cheap to be sentimental about it. That question of torture, though. It was evident that they intended to impale this man beside his fellow. He looked down at Nun and spoke to him directly:

"Why did you do it?"

Nun drew himself erect. He looked back at Moses. "It was the screams of Simeon," he answered. "I was Nun, the physician, once."

The name meant nothing to Moses. Unfortunately for his peace of mind, however, he understood what the man meant.

"You knew that it is death for a Hebrew to strike an Egyptian?" he asked.

"Yes," Nun said. At this instant Simeon screamed once more. The revolting, inhuman sound died away. "Yes, there are some things, O Prince," Nun added, "which, at the last, even a slave cannot endure. He was my sister's son. At the last I remembered that once I was a man."

It annoyed Moses to discover how clearly he comprehended. He glanced broodingly at the burly, brutal figure of Azkim. Beside him he heard Sinuhe say, under his breath but loud enough for Moses to hear:

"Better keep out of this. Merneptah will make an issue of it."

Sinuhe was right. Moses half raised his whip. Some compulsion, however, drew his glance once more to Nun. He saw the despair in the Hebrew's eyes. He realized how pitifully thin and old the man was. A sudden picture came to him of this Hebrew pushed down on a stake beside the other, his lean body twisting in torment. There was another picture, too, of himself spurning that other Hebrew before he went to Kush, in part, at least, because he was afraid of how Merneptah might use the incident if he intervened. Afraid of Merneptah! The hand with the whip dropped. His face flushed. By Osiris, what was he afraid of? What if the command to Naharin did hang in the balance? Was he not the conqueror of Kush? By Osiris, was he a Prince of Egypt or not? He turned to Azkim.

"You are going to impale him?"

"Yes, my lord." Azkim was eager. He misread Moses. He thought that the grandson of the Pharaoh, now that he had the matter straight in his mind, was pleased. He passed his tongue over his thick lips, smirking. "We were going to experiment with him a little first, my lord," he explained. "But if my lord wishes to see the sport. Here, Kharti, Senmut," he bawled to his men, gesticulating violently, "get a move on with that stake. Hurry——"

"Stop," Moses commanded. As Azkim turned back, his mouth dropping open, Moses leaned towards him from the chariot, his face dangerously grim. "Listen, dog," he said. "You are not to impale this man. Not now, or ever."

Azkim's bull neck swelled. His face flushed purple-red.

"But my lord, Prince Merneptah——"

"Silence, dog," Moses roared, the more violently because he could feel Sinuhe disapproving. "I'll answer to Prince Merneptah. On second thought let that man go. Send him back to Goshen. And don't think that you can play tricks with me—pretend, for instance, to let him go and kill him out of hand instead. I'm sending a squad of my men over to your barracks to make certain my orders have been obeyed. Understand? If anything has happened to that man you'll answer for it." He picked up the reins. "And," he added casually with a nod at Simeon, "send me an arrow into that carrion yonder."

"My men are not archers," Azkim growled.

Quick as a flash Moses dropped the reins. His bow was in his hands and the arrow on its way almost in one movement. It thudded home, cutting short Simeon's scream. Moses turned to Azkim.

"Do you want the next arrow?" he asked deliberately. "Come—answer me, and answer me properly."

Azkim gulped and swallowed. "No, my—my lord," he answered.

"Good. Now, give the order. Tell your guards to let that man off to go back to the barracks and start his journey to Goshen at once. Come—hurry."

Azkim gave the order. The guards stepped back. Nun stood, trembling uncontrollably, his mouth open, not able to take in as yet what had happened.

"Come," Moses said. "Be off."

The words brought Nun back to himself. He glanced around—Azkim, the Hebrews in the pit, Simeon, dead Simeon, on his stake, the hot sun, the blue sea. He gulped in a deep lungful of air. Not to be impaled! To live! To see Goshen! Not to feel that stake, that terrible stake, entering his vitals. Moses, son of Amram. But no, he must remember, Aahmose, Prince of Egypt. He dropped to his knees.

"Nun, the physician, will never forget," he babbled. "No, Nun, the physician, will never forget. He will tell his children. He will tell——"

"Come, that's all right," Moses interrupted, flushing. "Up from your knees, Nun. Be off with you."

Nun picked himself up and, with a last glance at Moses, turned and started to trudge across the fields towards the barracks. Moses watched him go for a moment. The Hebrews in the pits and in the lines of carriers were standing motionless. Moses would have been surprised to know that another part

of the legend about him was taking shape. He picked up the reins.

"I'll still send that squad over," he promised Azkim.

He shook out the reins. The horses moved off, their heads tossing. The dust rose up behind the chariot wheels. The hot sun beat down. Azkim shot his mouth. His bull neck flushed red. He picked up the whip he had dropped. He let out a bellow at his overseers.

"What are you looking at, you cat's offal, you dog's scourings," he bawled. "Get to work. Drive those filthy swine. By Set and by Amon, I'll have the guts out of the first man who laughs."

CHAPTER XIX

THE chariot tooled on towards Avaris. Sinuhe said nothing. Moses knew, however, that he was disapproving of him, and he realized himself that he had gone further than he had intended. There would be a clash with Merneptah in which he would not be on very solid ground. It was unfortunate, especially at this juncture. But then, the past three weeks had been weeks of very considerable strain, so that he had asked Sinuhe to go hunting, simply to get his mind off things. It was tense enough to have the Pharaoh deliberating and delaying his choice for a commander for the expedition up to Naharin. What really worried Moses, however, was the constant bickering between his wife and his mother, and the realization, beginning to come to him dimly that his fond belief, the night of his return, that all possibilities of trouble between the two were over, was a mirage. He thought over the incidents to which they appeared to attach great importance. They seemed trivial to him: Tharbis complaining of Bint-Anath's having the ladies of the court in to a reception and not including her, or of passing her by without speaking to her; Bint-Anath pointing out with cold insistence this or that transgression of etiquette by the "barbarian from Kush".

Picayune! Yet they wouldn't let him refuse to take sides. Each of them was continually demanding that he admit that she was completely in the right, and taking it as a personal insult if he tried to qualify his opinion in the slightest; Tharbis looking at him with melancholy reproach because his mother had reported that he had said such and such; Bint-Anath inquiring coldly if he had really stated that she was unfair to his wife. Above all his mother had not made one single move to help him achieve the command to Naharin.

Moses brooded over this for a moment. He realized clearly that it was her way of making it evident to him that without her influence he was helpless. But he could not understand why. It did not occur to him that she was still campaigning to remove Tharbis. To his forthright mind that question had been settled for once and for always on the night of his return. The only explanation of his mother's actions which occurred to him was that she had not been able as yet to overcome her hurt and displeasure at his marriage. He could understand this, especially since it was now evident that the two women jarred each other. But he hoped that his mother would recover from her mood soon. Else it might soon be too late. The Pharaoh must surely make his decision soon.

He comprehended that without his mother's help Merneptah would be almost certain to get the command. His frown deepened. Anyone but Merneptah, Merneptah, whom he had always hated, Merneptah, who constantly stood like an obstinate lump of amorphous stone in his path, Merneptah, whose eyes were far too free on Tharbis' body.

Moses gave the reins an impatient jerk. His reflections had brought him to something which he would have preferred not to remember. He had thought nothing of it when he had come on Tharbis, a few days ago, a red flower of the pomegranate in her hair, laughing and talking animatedly with Merneptah, her whole body seeming to undulate in eagerness, except to reflect in vexation that he must warn her that Merneptah was his enemy and also, very gently, that Merneptah—and other men—might mistake her vivacity for flirtatiousness. But Tharbis, without his saying a word, had been so very voluble with explanations that he had begun to feel uncomfortable. She had explained that she had met Merneptah quite by accident, entirely by accident, in fact. She had rushed on to say that, of course, she wanted to make a good impression for Moses' sake, that she didn't want his friends to think he had married a barbarian.

"Unfortunately, Merneptah isn't my friend," Moses had told her.

"Oh," Tharbis had said, her voice flat.

"You couldn't know," Moses had said, turning to her, not understanding that he was entirely misinterpreting the reason for her tone. "It wasn't your fault, darling. You don't have to make excuses to me."

Tharbis had glanced at him from under her eyelashes. "My—my father used to be so suspicious," she had observed looking down, a melancholy, misunderstood expression on her face.

Moses had gazed at her. He had seen the picture she had wanted him to see, an eager, vivacious girl without the slightest intent of wrongdoing but led into awkward-appearing situations by her thoughtlessness and taken to task by a harsh, brutal father.

"My poor darling," he had said, taking her into his arms.

This morning, however, he had again caught sight of her and Merneptah. Tharbis had not seen him. She had been laughing over her shoulder at Merneptah as she had walked away from him with a provocative sway of her hips.

Moses told himself now that it was just another accidental meeting and that Tharbis hadn't meant anything by the way she walked. Nor could she have any idea of the gossip which even an innocent meeting occasioned in the court of Egypt. He felt that he ought to explain this to her.

Yet he hesitated, even in his mind, to do this. He was afraid that he would be misunderstood, that Tharbis would shrink away from him, thinking that, like her father, he was suspicious of her.

Common sense, indeed, told him that it would be absurd of Tharbis to adopt such an attitude. But his inner consciousness apprehended that, if he did try, however gently, to speak to her about the incident he would, as had already happened on one or two occasions when he had made a suggestion about etiquette, discover himself put altogether in the wrong. It was a trick in which women seemed to be extraordinarily proficient, and Moses was aware for a moment of a sense of injustice. Why should any woman, even Tharbis, be as sensitive as that? But then, what man could understand women?

Moses shrugged his shoulders, not satisfied but abandoning the problem. He glanced at his friend. Sinuhe was lounging against the side of the chariot and there was no trace of sulkiness on his face. For an instant Moses felt a passionate envy of him, of his self-sufficiency, his cool poise, his lack of sudden impulses and self-examination. At the same time he knew a swift rush of affection. Whatever women were like, Sinuhe was one person upon whom he could depend entirely, absolutely. He said abruptly:

"I'm sorry."

"Sorry for what?"

"For making an idiot of myself back there."

Sinuhe's smile transfigured his whole face. "Don't think of it," he said warmly. "The only reason it worried me is because Merneptah is certain to make an issue of it."

"I'm not afraid of Merneptah."

Sinuhe looked at his friend, wondering whether he should caution him about the absurd rumours which were being spread these days by Merneptah and his mother. He decided against it.

"Merneptah is a good hater," he observed dryly.

"So am I. It's my mother who worries me, not Merneptah."

"Oh?"

"She won't speak to the Pharaoh about the command," Moses confided abruptly. "Not a single word. And, without her help——"

He left the sentence unfinished.

So that's it, Sinuhe thought. He glanced sideways at his friend, wondering whether he was fully cognizant about the conflict between his wife and his mother. He wondered, too, whether Moses had any idea about the kind of woman he had married. Probably not, he decided. Moses had always been singularly obtuse about women and what they were really like—and now that he was infatuated he would be even more obtuse. Sinuhe himself hadn't any doubts about Tharbis. One didn't need to have any doubts about a woman who went about with such an obvious interest in men and such an obvious desire to attract their admiration, her eyes wandering, her smile quick, and her whole body eager if any male stopped to talk to her. She had even, casually and as if by accident, intercepted him and no woman could act as she did who wasn't asking for trouble, whether she knew it or not—and Sinuhe had a pretty good idea that she did know it. He asked himself, in fact, whether he ought to warn Moses. But he decided against it. It would be a rather chancy thing to tell a man, particularly one so obviously infatuated as Moses, that his wife was a wanton. Instead he observed:

"Shall we stop in Avaris? My uncle will be glad to see us."

Moses nodded. He was not anxious to get back to the palace, not with the command in the balance and himself helpless in the face of the variance between his wife and his mother.

In the garden of the Pharaoh's palace Bint-Anath and Tharbis were facing each other. Among the branches above their heads tame monkeys and gaily coloured birds squawked and chattered. Beds of bright flowers bloomed around them. Through the shrubs and the trees one could glimpse the lotus floating on the lily pool and the pink-plumaged flamingoes standing on one leg, preening themselves.

The Princess, no matter how she tried to dissemble, was taut and angry. Her campaign had not gone well. She scarcely realized as yet that, in her cynicism, she had failed to com-

prehend the quality of Moses' affection for Tharbis. It was, indeed, beyond Bint-Anath's comprehension that a man could so love a woman that his desire for her was not lust but something so deep and so transcendental that the physical was relatively unimportant, even though to Moses possession of Tharbis was a sublime expression of what he believed to be a shared union of body and spirit.

But the Princess did understand clearly that she had badly underestimated the cleverness of her opponent. Bint-Anath had expected the girl to be an awestruck and somewhat stupid barbarian. Instead she had discovered her to possess a quite uncanny shrewdness. When the Princess gave Tharbis the correct advice she took it, no matter what the tone or manner in which it was wrapped. Then, when the Princess, shifting her tactics, had proceeded to advise the girl wrongly she had promptly discarded those suggestions with an insolent casualness which bit into Bint-Anath's marrow.

This last and the way in which Tharbis seemed to attract popularity as easily as the honeysuckle gathers bees had been so annoying that the Princess had been led to declare open war against her daughter-in-law. Bint-Anath was willing to admit now that this had been an error. It had put her in the wrong with Moses. It had given Tharbis a marvellous opportunity, which she had at once seized, to pose as an injured person both before Moses and the court. In addition, the barbarian had proved that she could sting. With an artistic artlessness which was superb, she had let fall seemingly naïve—but devastating—comments about the Princess. These, of course, Bint-Anath's best friends had hastened to report to her. "I don't like to tattle, my dear—but you really should know——"

That sort of thing. And the Princess had had to smile and smile. The latest of these comments, which was too shrewd to be the least bit funny, was in her mind at this moment.

She persisted, nevertheless, in the object for which she had, this morning, waylaid Tharbis. When one has made an error, one must, if possible, repair the damage. The difficulty was that her daughter-in-law did not appear to pay any attention to the bough of peace Bint-Anath had held out. The Princess tried again, forcing herself to smile and to make her voice persuasive.

"Why not be friends? It is absurd, really"—Bint-Anath gave a little laugh and made a dainty gesture with her hands to emphasize the absurdity—"for the two of us to be at cross-purposes."

Tharbis, who was standing, perfectly coiffed and gowned, in

an indolent, casual pose and staring off, apparently, at the flamingoes, gave no sign that she had heard. Bint-Anath went a stage further.

"I'm willing to admit that I took the wrong attitude," she pointed out, reflecting viciously that if she succeeded in her ultimate purpose, Tharbis would pay to the last drop for the humiliation of this scene. "After all, you might try to understand my point of view. Moses is my son——"

"He is my husband," Tharbis remarked, not taking her gaze from the flamingoes.

The Princess managed to keep smiling. "Exactly. That is my whole argument. We both wish his welfare." She took a step towards the girl, hating that rounded, youthful body. "We both wish him to be successful, to become more powerful——"

"He is a Prince of Egypt," Tharbis stated, as if that were position enough and one need not to go further.

Bint-Anath bit her lip. She tried another approach.

"Granted. But there are circles within circles at the court of Egypt. To be merely a Prince of Egypt is not enough. There are scores of Princes. Here—in Egypt—one can be a Prince and still be nothing—unless one takes care. Moses, for instance, is only a grandson of the Pharaoh. Merneptah, to take another example, is the Pharaoh's son and for that one reason alone is more important and has more power and influence than your—your—husband—unless the proper measures are taken to exalt Moses."

She saw that she had at last made an impression. Tharbis left off staring at the flamingoes and transferred her gaze to Bint-Anath. The Princess, encouraged, went on:

"You see now what I mean. It is to your advantage, as well as to mine, for Moses to become more powerful. To achieve that end we must work in harmony—not at cross-purposes. As I have already said, I admit that I was jealous of you. We are alone. I don't need to pretend. I admit that I have tried to injure you."

Tharbis said nothing. Was the girl really as stupid as she looked at this moment? The Princess asked herself in vexation, not comprehending any more than Moses did that Tharbis acted from intuitive instinct and that to appeal to her intelligence was wasted effort.

"I'll give that up," the Princess went on, smiling as convincingly as she could. "I'll admit right now that you have more influence with Moses than I have. On the other hand he needs my influence with the Pharaoh to advance his career—that command to Naharin, for instance. So, my dear"—she

took another step towards her daughter-in-law and put a graceful hand on her arm—"can't we forget our quarrels? Let's be friends."

Tharbis looked at the hand on her arm. She said:

"One isn't friends—not with a snake."

Bint-Anath took her hand away as if a scorpion had stung it. She recoiled a step. Her eyes glittered. She thrust forward her head and was, abruptly, as deadly as what Tharbis had called her.

"Take care—girl——"

Tharbis smiled, an indolent, confident smile. "You can't *do* anything."

"Can't I?" The Princess paused. She seemed to gather herself together. "You called me 'old hag' yesterday, didn't you?"

Tharbis smiled broadly. "What I said was, 'I wonder why an old hag like the Princess keeps making eyes at every man she meets. Does she think she's still young and beautiful?'"

"You—you Kushite whore!"

"Bad names cook no lentils."

"I've seen you with Merneptah. I'll tell Moses. We'll see what he'll say to that."

Tharbis did not answer. Her smile was insolent as she assumed, casually, a disdainful, graceful pose which brought out all the rounded, seductive voluptuousness of her young body. Bint-Anath recognised the answer. She said:

"I'll have you out of Egypt. I swear it."

"My Moses is a Prince of Egypt," Tharbis stated indolently as if that settled the matter. "A grandson of the Pharaoh."

"Is he? Is he now? Why, you fool, if I were to say the word——"

Bint-Anath checked herself, realizing with a chilling shock how near she had come to the edge of the precipice. She stood very still for a moment, to regain control of herself and to decide what to do next.

"You're a jealous old woman," Tharbis observed. "Why don't you see your day is over. An old hag who——"

Bint-Anath slapped her daughter-in-law viciously. Tharbis blinked and stared blankly at her mother-in-law for an instant. Then, without the slightest change in expression she struck back. Bint-Anath, accustomed all her life to imperious domination, was not prepared either for the blow or the young strength in it. She was tumbled off her feet into a bed of chrysanthemums. Tharbis laughed. Then she turned and walked insolently, slowly back towards the palace.

Bint-Anath stared after her. Then, gathering herself together,

she got up from the flower bed and began to brush herself off. Her mind was quite clear and coldly logical. A crisis had been reached. She would make one last appeal to Moses, give him his choice between Tharbis and power. If that did not achieve anything, then, she would send for Bahri. Bahri was a man of handy ideas. One would have to be very careful, of course. A kidnapping first, for instance. Or else an accident. An accident would be better—except that mere death was too simple. Still, one could not afford to have to explain to the Pharaoh. Above all, one must keep any suspicion of the real truth away from Moses, since, otherwise, one would lose him forever. Better, in fact, if Moses were away when it happened.

Away? The Princess paused in the act of rearranging her wig. That command to Naharin. Tell Moses she wouldn't get it for him unless he repudiated Tharbis. But if he refused, get it all the same—and then—when he was away—an accident.

She put up her hands to her wig again. But, abruptly, a lightning flash of rage ran through her. Her hands trembled. Her whole body trembled. Knocked into a flower bed! And by that—that barbarian. She, the Princess Bint-Anath, the daughter of the Pharaoh! And the girl would tell of it. Yes, the clever little whore, she would let it out casually. She, the Princess Bint-Anath!

The Princess controlled her trembling. She finished with her wig. She began to examine the rents in her gown. She realized that she could not be satisfied with a simple accident. No, the girl must be repudiated publicly, humiliated publicly. And then when she was on her way back to Kush in disgrace and no one cared about her any more, then she could be spirited away without anyone noticing. And then—the Princess gritted her teeth—Tharbis, that barbarian—in her power—ah, the things she would do to her. . . .

The very thought of what she would do to the girl had set the Princess trembling again. She controlled it once more. How to persuade Moses to repudiate the girl? That was the question.

Bint-Anath started to walk thoughtfully back towards the palace. She hoped the threat of not getting the command would be sufficient. It might—in view of the delay and the mounting tension about it—and Moses, ambitious as he was and hating Merneptah as he did, must now realize as he had not realized three weeks ago that he could not secure it without her help.

Yet that threat might not be sufficient. The Princess had not as yet seen any signs that what she considered to be Moses' lust for Tharbis was reaching satiety. It would be better if she could find some additional argument. . . .

The way the girl had struck her, *her*, his mother! The Princess stopped in her tracks. Why hadn't she thought of that before? How stupid she had been not to think of that at once? Her whole face lit up with a savage triumph. She brushed aside any thought that this new Moses might not regard the blow and the circumstances of it as she herself did, or that he might consider the blow she herself had struck Tharbis as a sufficient justification for his wife's action. To a woman of her egotism these possibilities simply were not valid. She was a Princess, the daughter of Rameses the Great. And Moses was her son. She was his mother—or he believed she was. When he heard that his wife had struck *her*, the Princess, his mother—why, of course . . .

She began to walk forward rapidly. See Moses. At once—or as soon as possible. Then get that command from the Pharaoh. Yes, see Moses first. The command could wait for the moment. But not long. The Pharaoh would have to make a decision soon.

The same thought was in the Pharaoh's mind as he sat on the northern balcony of his palace that evening. The night breeze from the sea was cool. At his side was a table of ebony inlaid with ivory, and on it was a goblet of cooled wine and fruit on a golden platter. The Pharaoh nibbled at the fruit and sipped the wine and reflected that the choice had really narrowed itself to Merneptah and Moses. Harkhuf, of course, would, as usual, be the real commander. It was only a question of nominating the titular head. Rameses had, indeed, delayed this long, simply because he had a constitutional dislike of delegating power to anyone. It was pleasurable, likewise, to keep a prize dangling and to watch people snatch for it greedily. In this particular case, spice was added to the game by the failure of Bint-Anath, since the return of her adopted son, to beset him with her usual entreaties. It had not taken a man as acute and as skilled in intrigue as the Pharaoh long to ferret out the reason for this. Being the man he was he had sat back to wait in amusement for the issue of the conflict between his daughter and her daughter-in-law.

He reflected, however, that he could not postpone the decision much longer. The expedition really ought to have been on its way before this. He put a date in his mouth. Merneptah, now, was a son of whom he had never been particularly fond, and he still felt that the man was inclined to take too much for granted, particularly since the death of Khamwese. The Pharaoh didn't like people who took too much for granted. On the other hand, Merneptah's mother, Tiyy, headed a powerful faction in the

court and to slap her in the face twice in succession might not be wise.

The Pharaoh took time out to wonder how that bag of bones could ever have seemed attractive to him. Even in her prime, she had been on the skinny side. However, there it was and the blundering, obstinate Merneptah was the result. Ah, well, when a man's young, anything serves.

Now as to Moses. The Pharaoh told himself that he liked the young man personally. A bit of a fool, but his naïveté was refreshing; and he had certainly shown ability in that affair of Kush. On the other hand, it wouldn't do to make the young man too powerful, not with Bint-Anath in the background.

Besides, what was his parentage? the Pharaoh asked himself, frowning. This question, which had been of no importance twenty-five years ago, had now assumed a certain amount of significance. The Pharaoh had not the slightest intention of exalting some unknown bastard to a position of power. No, it was necessary to have a chat with Bint-Anath on this point before he reached a final decision; and it occurred to him that in her present mood of disgruntlement with Moses it might be easier to get the secret out of her. Yes, that was what he would do.

Happy at having reached a conclusion which would enable him to postpone his final word for a day or two longer the Pharaoh leaned back in his chair, took a sip of wine and allowed his mind to wander to a more congenial occupation, a consideration of what he had built and would build. The walls of Avaris were almost completed. It would still take some little time to finish the forts between the city and the Bitter Lakes, especially since, in the meantime, there was an obelisk to be raised at Tanis and a temple being repaired at Abusir and work going on apace on the magnificent palace he was building for himself on the left bank of the river at Thebes. Ah, that was a work of art. But this eastern border, now. Even if Avaris successfully blocked the coastal route into Egypt, there was still a possible avenue of invasion farther south through Goshen.

The Pharaoh considered the point carefully. To a ruler of his long reign and wide experience the events in the north were disturbing. They smacked, as they did to Aaron, altogether too much of the situation, centuries ago, out of which had suddenly appeared the Hyksos to flood into an unprotected Egypt. In those days, as he recalled from history, the Peoples of the North, not content with moving into the land which the Myceneans now held, had also swarmed into Asia. The result had been cataclysmic; and the troublesome empire of the Kheta had,

indeed, been a consequence of that great invasion. At a later date Knossos, the great city in the Isle of the Kheftiu with which Egypt had had close trading relationships, had been overwhelmed by the people who had now established themselves in Mycenae. The Pharaoh reflected irritably that the Peoples of the North ought to have been satisfied. But now, apparently, they were on the move again, pouring down into the lands around the Inland Sea out of some inexhaustible reservoir beyond the borders of civilization. Why in Set's name they couldn't be content to stay where they were was beyond him. Rameses had no desire to fight any more campaigns, not at his age. However, it would be foolish to blink the fact that the Kheta were being hard-pressed and that out of the North might suddenly appear a horde swooping down on Egypt, so that this expedition up to Naharin to consolidate the frontier of Egypt and to help the Kheta had become necessary and vital. It might also be well to build a fortress city and storehouses in Goshen itself. One needed a secondary line of defence. Those Hebrews, curse the dogs, would have to sweat some more. He must tell Merneptah to drive them harder.

He was still engaged in this line of thought when, a short while later, Moses and Merneptah intruded on his privacy, both flushed and both obviously out of temper. The Pharaoh, who did not like to be interrupted at this hour, was annoyed. Merneptah, however, was too angry either to notice this or to remember the ordinary nuances of approach to the Pharaoh. Without preliminaries he burst into his complaint, the interference of Moses with the justice being meted out by his head overseer. The scowl on the Pharaoh's face grew deeper. When his son finished speaking, Rameses glanced at Moses. Moses dropped on one knee.

"The dog was insolent to me, a Prince of Egypt, O Ruler-of-Thy-People," he pointed out. "Perhaps I was wrong to interfere. But for a dog of an overseer to speak impudently to me, a grandson of the Pharaoh—was I to permit that, O Ruler-of-the-Two-Lands?"

"That puts rather a different face on it, doesn't it?" the Pharaoh observed to Merneptah, beginning to enjoy the situation.

"He's a Hebrew lover!" Merneptah blurted out.

Moses stood up. "I am a grandson of Rameses the Great," he said proudly. "Whether a Hebrew is involved or not, an insult to me is an insult to the Pharaoh."

Merneptah stared at him with his bulging, obsidian eyes, his whole being boiling with rage. He longed to burst out with the suspicions which his mother had confided in him. Tiyy,

however, had impressed on her son that to make a definite accusation without proof to back it up would mean destruction, and as yet, Baal-Hanan, her steward, had not even been able to locate Jochebed. To Tiyy, not knowing just how careful both Jochebed and Aaron had been to eliminate any possibility of a connection being traced between Hadad, the Syrian, and Amram, the jeweller of Memphis, this was incomprehensible and annoying. She might have her suspicions. But until Jochebed and her family could be put to the torture she could not be certain; and while spreading a whisper here and there she had seen to it that Merneptah was told and told again and again just how devastating to themselves a false accusation could be. Yet there was one thing of which Merneptah could be sure. This arrogant young man! Bearding him, Prince Merneptah! He'd take him down a peg.

"You, a grandson of the Pharaoh!" he blurted out. "Ask the woman you call your mother. You're no more a grandson of the Pharaoh than Azkim—or that Hebrew dog you saved."

"Merneptah!" said the Pharaoh, coldly and warningly.

"It's true, isn't it?" Merneptah rushed on, glaring at his father. "You know it's true. My mother knows it's true. Everyone knows, except this—this Moses. By the phallus of Min, it's time he knew it, too."

Moses stared at him, his mouth open, too bewildered to be angry.

"You seem to forget that, by a decree of mine, Moses is the true son of the Princess Bint-Anath, the fruit of her own womb," observed the Pharaoh, his heavy-lidded eyes half-closed. "There's a penalty attached to that decree also. You seem to have forgotten it."

But Merneptah was not to be daunted.

"Then why don't we know who his real father is?" he bawled. "Why does he get all the plums? Who knows who his father is, a porter, perhaps, or a water carrier? Or his mother, either, for that matter, unless Bint-Anath did a little more in the reeds than hunt for an ark. By Set——"

He had got this far when realization, at last, broke in on Moses of just what Merneptah was saying. To realize and to act were one and the same thing. With an inarticulate curse he struck Merneptah heavily in the face. The Pharaoh's son staggered back.

"Prince Aahmosel!" the Pharaoh said sternly, rising in his place. Moses, whose hand had been lifted to strike again, remembered where he was. He dropped his fist. But Merneptah, recovering himself, pulled out his dagger with a vicious curse. Moses put his hand on his own, watching the Pharaoh.

"Must I call my guards?" Rameses asked, his voice as cold as the ice of the North.

Merneptah paused. "He struck me," he growled.

"He told lies, abominable lies," Moses countered.

"Not lies. Ask the Pharaoh, my father."

Moses glanced at the Pharaoh. For the first time he realized that the Pharaoh had not denied what his son had said. For the first time the chilling thought invaded him that there might be something in these absurd accusations. But how could there be? His hand fell away from his dagger. He was the son of the Princess Bint-Anath. That much he never doubted, in spite of what Merneptah had declared. But his father—yes, that Prince Dedi whom he couldn't remember, might not be his father. Yes, that was possible. Who, then, was his father? He stared at the Pharaoh, and Rameses could see the wonder, the appeal in his eyes. He sat down slowly in his chair, considering the situation. This matter had gone too far now to be hushed up with words. One could, of course, punish Merneptah with the death provided by the decree. That, however, would not only create still more talk but was manifestly absurd. Or he could deny Merneptah's statement and throw the fear of Set into his son so that he would keep quiet hereafter. On the other hand, if one were to stir the broth just right, throw something else into the cauldron, it might bubble over. Who knew what one might find out then? Bint-Anath had been too secret about the parentage of this young man. If he were to show by a gesture to Bint-Anath that, whether she used her influence on behalf of her adopted son or not, Moses was exalted, that might be the final catalyst, since it was clear to the Pharaoh that Bint-Anath was counting on the threat of not using her influence for Moses to bring him to heel about Tharbis. Besides, it would punish Merneptah for so far forgetting himself as to start a brawl in his presence.

All this had been passing through his mind in the space of time it had taken him to settle down in his chair. He said to Moses:

"You had better inquire of the Princess Bint-Anath about your parentage." He paused to enjoy the bewilderment, the fear on Moses' face. Then he added: "At the same time, you can tell her that you are named commander-in-chief of the expedition which goes up to Naharin."

It was an amazing announcement to both Merneptah and Moses. Moses' face lit up. To him this settled the question of his parentage. With an exclamation of joy he prostrated himself at the Pharaoh's feet. Merneptah tried to say something but couldn't. Turning his back squarely on his father and without

a pretence at a farewell, he pounded over to the stairway and down it. You could hear him cursing. A thin smile curved the Pharaoh's lips. Perfect. Merneptah would go straight to Tiyy. Now to get this young man off to Bint-Anath and then sit back and wait for the varying eruptions which ought to follow. He looked down at Moses.

"But, remember, I don't know who your parents are," he observed. "Only the Princess Bint-Anath can tell you that." He paused. "About *both* your parents," he added slowly, spacing each word and enjoying the bewilderment succeeded by fear and anxiety which replaced exultation in the face which stared up at him.

CHAPTER XX

THE Princess had been waiting. Slave after slave had been sent for Moses but had returned unsuccessful since, after dining with Intef, Moses and Sinuhe had gone fowling before Moses had finally returned to the Pharaoh's palace to find Merneptah waiting at the entrance. With each passing hour, as was natural, Bint-Anath's tautness and her savage, suppressed anger had increased. In consequence, when Moses was suddenly announced she was like a bow which, stretched to its utmost tension, is suddenly released and she almost catapulted from her chair in her eagerness.

"Out," she said to her women. "Out!"

She stood waiting. Moses burst in.

"This has gone far enough," the Princess began.

"Mother, whose son am I?" Moses cried in the same instant.

They stopped and stared at each other.

"Mother, Merneptah says——" Moses began again.

"I won't have it," Bint-Anath blazed out. "Tharbis must go."

Moses goggled at her. "But it's Merneptah."

"It's Tharbis, I say. That—that——" A name vile enough failed the Princess. "She struck me, Moses. *Me*."

"Struck—you?"

"Yes. Make up your mind, Moses. Either you're my son or that slut's husband. Make your choice."

But at this moment the question of his parentage engrossed Moses' mind more than any quarrel, however violent, between his wife and his mother. He cried:

"That's just it. Merneptah says——"

"If you want that command in Naharin," Bint-Anath went on passionately, "you must send that Kushite whore back

where she belongs. Striking *me*. Calling *me* 'old hag'. No, Moses, I won't stir a step to get you that command until that barbarian is where she belongs."

"But I've got the command."

"What!"

"Just now." Moses dismissed the matter impatiently, as of little account. "It's all settled. The Pharaoh announced it to me and Merneptah a few moments ago."

This casual statement was so amazing that it took an instant or two for the sense of it to penetrate fully into Bint-Anath's consciousness. When it did she found herself unable for the moment to think coherently. There was a couch near. She sank down on it gingerly, feeling as if the solid foundation of her world had begun to crumble.

"He has given you that command?"

"Yes."

"Without consulting me?"

"Yes. But that doesn't matter. What matters is——"

"It isn't possible."

"That isn't important," Moses said irritably. He came closer to his mother. "Listen. Merneptah says I'm not your son."

"What?"

"Merneptah says I'm not your son. And the Pharaoh—the Pharaoh—he didn't deny it." Moses paused. Then, abruptly he dropped on one knee and gazed up into her eyes. "It isn't true, is it, Mother?" he cried. "Tell me, it isn't true?"

The Princess, who had been too busy trying to realize the full import of the news about the command to take in clearly what Moses had been saying, looked at him: "What was that?"

"Merneptah said nobody knew who my parents were. He said I am not your son. But that, at least, isn't true, is it? It can't be true."

This time Bint-Anath had followed what her adopted son was saying. She tried to gather her faculties together.

"Merneptah said that?"

"Yes, Set curse him."

"What did the Pharaoh say?"

"He sent me to you. He said that only you knew who my parents were. But I'm your son anyway, am I not? No matter who my father was. I'm still your son?"

So the secret was out, or at least, as much of it as was really common property to everyone but Moses. But, apparently, no one had a hint of the real secret, the secret which was known only to herself. No, she was safe. But what to do about Moses,

Moses who had got this command without any help from her, without her influence? That meant, she realized abruptly, that he was free of her, that the club of the command had been wrenched from her hand, that, since Moses had paid no attention to the insult to herself, she could not force him away from Tharbis, unless—unless—what Merneptah had said—and the Pharaoh had not denied . . .

The Princess sat up with a gasp. As the Pharaoh had in a way divined, she saw suddenly a sword with which to divide Moses from Tharbis. There was no time to look around that weapon, to see whether it was two-edged or not. She decided to use it. Her face sharpened.

"No," she said flatly. "You are not my son. I adopted you."

Moses sprang to his feet. "Mother!"

Bint-Anath said nothing. She watched Moses closely.

"Not—not your son?" he stammered. "Not—not a Prince of Egypt?"

This was the moment. "Not *born* a Prince of Egypt." Bint-Anath leaned forward. "Not *born* a Prince. But I have made you one. I can keep you one—if you obey me."

Moses looked at her for a long instant. "Then—who are my parents?" he whispered. "Who are they? In the name of Amon, who am I?"

The Princess rose, a little smile of triumph on her lips as she saw her course clear before her. She came over to Moses and spoke clearly, deliberately.

"Listen to me, Moses. You are my adopted son. Remember that. Have I not always treated you as my own son?"

"Yes. But——"

"Then, do not trouble as to who your parents are. They do not matter. What does matter is that I have adopted you as my own son and that the Pharaoh, my father, has accepted you as his grandson. You *are* a Prince of Egypt. I have made you one."

Moses stared at her. "Merneptah——"

"A dozen Merneptahs cannot alter that fact—not if you obey me."

Moses' mind was working sluggishly. But he comprehended what Bint-Anath meant. He sat down heavily.

"You mean—send Tharbis away?"

The Princess, very sure of herself, nodded. Moses sat. His position was gradually becoming clear to him. A man of unknown origin—a bastard. One who had no standing except by the Princess' grace. Did she but say the word, publicly, everyone would know of it. His popularity and his influence would drop

as rapidly as lead sinks in water. People would point at him. He would be cast out.

And yet, to send Tharbis back, never to see her again, never to possess her again, to think of some other man, perhaps—

This last thought was as a knife piercing slowly, agonizingly to his heart. He saw her pouting lips, her rounded body, her melancholy, heavy-lidded eyes, the sensitive profile of her face. To send the woman he loved back in disgrace! To humiliate her, publicly, in the eyes of the court and of her own people! To force her, perhaps, defenceless, into the arms of some coarse, brutal barbarian back in Kush! The woman he loved! The woman who loved him, who had trusted him with the whole of herself, not just her body, but with all of herself in complete surrender! How could he?

And then, as if his agony had sharpened his wits a solution flashed suddenly into his mind. The sense of relief was so overwhelming that, for an instant, he felt faint and dizzy. Then he got up. He smiled.

"No, Princess," he said. "No, I won't do that. I'll keep Tharbis."

The Princess gazed at him, her lower jaw dropping. Then, abruptly, a rage that was cataclysmic surged up in her. She let it rise, careless at this moment of all consequences.

"You fool!" she hissed. "I can make you."

There was no feeling of love between them any more. They faced each other, open enemies, and neither of them stopped to reflect about what Tharbis had destroyed. The smile was still on Moses' lips.

"Oh no, you can't," he said. "No, you can't, Princess. You have not told me who my parents are. But you seem to forget that, *knowing* that I was your adopted son, the Pharaoh has, as you yourself have said, accepted me as your son and as his grandson. More than that, *knowing* that I was only your adopted son, he has made me commander-in-chief to Naharin. What does that prove? That proves that you have builded too well. That shows that now, even if you tell the world that I am only your adopted son, it will make no difference. After all these years the Pharaoh cannot go back on the position he has taken. Nor can you. As you yourself have said, you have made me a Prince of Egypt. You can't take that away—now. The Pharaoh has made that evident. He has made me, his grandson, commander-in-chief to Naharin—without your help. I don't need you any more, Princess. I can stand on my own feet."

"Can you? Can you so? You—you—I'll tell the Pharaoh who your parents really are."

"What difference will that make?" Moses smiled a superior smile. "Be sensible, Princess."

The Princess drew in her breath. "You fool! They are Hebrews!"

Hebrews! Slaves! His fine argument was falling, shattered, about his ears. He could not think. He gazed dumbly at the Princess.

"Yes, Hebrews!" she shot out viciously, enjoying the helplessness of this creation of hers who, in his folly, had thought that he was no longer dependent on her, exulting in her victory. "Jochebed—and Amram."

The pieces were falling magically into place. Aunt Jochebed—the way she had used to look at him—Miriam, when she was angry one day—Uncle Amram—no *Father* Amram—calling him "son" and himself not noticing . . .

"Now my fine young man, you'll do what I want," the Princess was crowing at him. "Now, you'll do as I say, you son of a slave, a Hebrew slave. You know how the Pharaoh hates the Hebrews. Suppose I were to tell him? You see, you're in my power—mine. Now, will you send that slut away, that Kushite slut who struck *me*, a daughter of the Pharaoh, who——"

But Moses seemed scarcely to hear her. After a long stare at her which saw nothing, he turned away and walked out of the room stiffly, like a drunken man who needs to make sure just where his footsteps fall.

CHAPTER XXI

THE dark night was around him. The reeds were thick and dank. Above him the stars were remote, uncaring. He did not know where he was. He did not care. He had been wandering for hours. At one time he must have flung himself down, for his kilt and tunic were soiled, and muddy. There had been no connected thought, only a series of explosions recurring in his brain. Not a Prince of Egypt! Not a grandson of the Pharaoh! Not an Egyptian at all! A Hebrew! A damned, despised Hebrew! How could one short hour make such a difference? In Bint-Anath's power, utterly in her power, to lift up or to cast down. Why had the gods made such a mock of him?

These were the disjointed thoughts—though one can scarcely call them thoughts; they were, rather, emotional eruptions—which had been thundering crazily in his brain as he wandered

blindly through the darkness. But weariness of body to some degree exorcises intensity of emotion. A certain lucidity returned to him. He came to a halt. He observed the reeds. He heard the splash of some animal in the river. He slapped at the mosquitoes. He realized that he was far from the palace. He also began to realize that he must determine upon a course of action. Oh, if today had never been! he exclaimed within himself. Oh, if he could push it back within the womb of Time and never let it be born!

But it could not be forgotten. Even now it was hammering at him. A Hebrew! Not a Prince of Egypt. A Hebrew! What would not Merneptah make of it when he learned it? What could the future hold for him?

He looked this way and that in the darkness like an animal hemmed in by hunters. Pictures began to flash through his mind, of kneeling in prayer to Yahweh and repeating the words after Aunt Jochebed—no, *Mother* Jochebed—of wandering through the towering halls of Amon's temple at Karnak, of watching his grandfather—no, he wasn't his grandfather, he must hold fast to that—of watching the Pharaoh give judgment in his Hall of Audience—of spurning that poor wretch of a Hebrew—ah, he mustn't think of that—a wretch of his own race, ah, vile—vile. Aaron, that boy he had never liked, Aaron was his brother. Strange! Why couldn't he have known? Why couldn't he have felt it? He, a Prince of Egypt. Fool that he had been! A Prince of Egypt! Proud, arrogant, pluming himself. And, all the time . . .

He groaned aloud in the darkness. He started to lift up his hands to Amon to pray for help. Then, he remembered. His hands dropped. What was it Ipuwer had said?

"Each god, Moses, is but a manifestation of the one true God, He who is uncreate but creates all things. He who is not imaged by man's hands nor captured by their thoughts but *is*."

But who was the one true God? Where was He? Amon? Amon was god of the Egyptians. Yahweh? Yahweh was the Hebrew god. But he did not want to pray to Yahweh. He did not want to be a Hebrew. Yet he was.

He started to tear off blindly through the reeds. He checked himself. It was of no avail to run away any longer. The fact must be faced. It would not be escaped. He must face it. He was a Hebrew. God could not help him. No one could help him. He must help himself.

Tharbis! The thought was like a thunderclap. What would happen to Tharbis if it became known? Himself a Hebrew. How could he help Tharbis, that lovely, delicate woman who had

put her life within his hands? He could not help her. He could not help himself.

It was more than he could bear. He stared around him again, not because he could see more than reeds, vague in the darkness, or hear more than their gentle rustle in the tiny breeze, but because intense emotion demands some physical action. Yes, he was helpless. No one could help him except, perhaps, Yahweh, God of the Hebrews, Aunt Jochebed's God. It was long since he had prayed to him. He lifted his hands.

"O Yahweh, God of the Hebrews, help me," he prayed, the Hebrew words which he had learned so long ago at Jochebed's knee coming to him rusty with unuse. "O Yahweh, if Thou be God, send me aid. Give me counsel."

He waited. But there was no sign, no feeling within himself that Yahweh had either heard or answered. He dropped his hands.

He looked out into the darkness. There were stars on the far horizon. He lifted his eyes to them. Yes, the stars were there, the stars which Ipuwer had once said were not stars but other worlds, illimitably remote in space. Thinking of Ipuwer seemed to calm him. Ipuwer had always had the faculty of making the present seem insignificant as compared to the immensity of space and time. Yes, that was it. He must cling to that. The immensity of space and time. He, Moses, stood there at this moment, suffering. A hundred years from now, who else would stand here? How would that unknown feel? What problems would he face? Yet how could any problem equal his own?

The attempt to philosophize failed. A Hebrew! A slave! How could he face Tharbis, knowing what, unwittingly, he had done to her? The treacherous thought occurred to him that he could accept the terms of the Princess, his mother—no, not his mother. Aunt Jochebed was his mother. But he could accept her terms, send Tharbis away, remain a Prince of Egypt. Yes, that was it. No one would know. A Prince of Egypt, still.

But no Tharbis. He would lose Tharbis. Either way he would lose. What meaning could life have without Tharbis? Send Tharbis away? Yet, surely he must. For her sake as well as his own. Lose Tharbis. Never to see her again.

The shreds of self-control dissolved. He cried aloud, shaking his fists at the remote, uncaring stars. He cursed wildly, violently. With an inarticulate sound he started to trample blindly through the reeds, giving no heed to where he was going, not caring whether he stepped on a crocodile or plunged into the river. He heard nothing, saw nothing. A Hebrew! A slave! Those were the words hammering at his brain. He did not hear the

dull sound of the blows or the sobbing groans that followed them. He would not have cared if he had. But, just as the darkness began to lighten ever so little, he broke through a fringe of reeds and came upon them.

For a moment he stood and stared stupidly. Then, his eyes focused. His mind cleared to the extent that he realized what it was. A surge of rage so devastating, so over-powering that it made him quiver like a reed in the wind, poured up through him; and at the same time he felt a fierce, a savage, an unreasoning joy. With one stride he was across the space and upon them.

"Stop!" he roared.

Azkim's back had been towards him and Azkim had been too absorbed in the pleasure of what he was doing even to hear Moses' approach. He swung round. In the scanty light he did not recognize Moses. How could one, anyway, recognize in this fierce, vague figure the magnificent young man of the chariot? Azkim's teeth rasped together.

"Get out," he snarled. "Out, I say." And with no more words he turned back, swinging up his whip. In a fierce leap Moses caught the upraised arm. With a savage bellow Azkim whirled and struck. Moses went staggering back. A cold fury, cold and savage as the frost of the dark, cold North, seized on him. He forgot that he was a slave, a Hebrew. It was Moses, Prince of Egypt, struck in the face by a commoner, who whipped out his dagger and leaped to strike. But without his knowing it, it was also Moses, the Hebrew, Moses who had passed through agony because he was a Hebrew, who leaped with him.

Azkim, however, was quick. The whip dropped. His thick powerful fingers snatched the dagger hand and held it. They grappled. They tripped and fell. They rolled over and over in the filth and mud, biting, gouging, kicking. Azkim was a burly man. Strong though Moses was, savagely furious though he was, he could not overcome him. He found himself underneath. Azkim's weight was on him. Azkim's fetid, panting breath was in his face. Was he to die here like a dog? In one supreme effort Moses wrenched his right hand free. The dagger went home so savagely that the hilt bruised his hand. The weight on top of him went limp. Moses pushed it off. He stood up. He looked down on Azkim. That, he thought, starting to wipe off the dagger, will teach you not to strike a Prince of Egypt.

But he was not a Prince of Egypt! It seemed almost to be shouted in his ear. Not a Prince of Egypt who had killed an insolent overseer. No, he was a Hebrew, a slave, who had killed an Egyptian. Prince Merneptah would hear of it. Prince Merneptah would use it against him.

An unreasoning panic had him in its fingers. He glanced around him, his eyes staring wildly. In the dim vague light there was a dull gleam of water among the reeds. The river—that was it!

Azkim was a heavy weight, inert, limp, his arms and legs dangling. But, somehow, he got him to the edge of the river. Somehow, he tossed him from him and listened to the splash and waited. But nothing happened. Nothing! Were there not crocodiles in Egypt? Were all the gods against him? And then there was a sudden swirling in the grey water, a horrible swirling, one that was soundless and yet shrieking of gruesome finality. Moses shuddered. He turned and retraced his steps, and it seemed to him that something out of the primeval mud was at his back.

Yet, somehow, that swirl in the water had acted as a catharsis to his emotions. His panic was gone. His wild rebellion at what fate had done to him was, also, for the moment, quieted. It was as if, having plumbed the depth of human emotions, he had attained the calmness of one who was resigned to whatever might happen to him. At any rate, he could think connectedly again and it was not a surprise but, in some curious fashion, exactly what he had expected to discover when he found that the man whom Azkim had been flogging to death was Nun, the physician, the Hebrew whom a few short hours ago—though now those hours seemed æons—he had saved from impalement.

Moses did not know how this had happened. He did not know that, as soon as Azkim had talked to Merneptah and had got his permission, he had started out to pursue the Hebrew who had escaped him and, catching him, had not been able to wait until he got him back to barracks to avenge the humiliation of the morning. But Moses did not care. Nun presented him with one problem more. This did not worry him. Moses had, indeed, attained the weariness of despair. Not for a moment, however, did he consider leaving the old man here, either to die, or to make out as best he could. For in the few steps from the river banks to Nun, it had come upon Moses what he was going to do. He was going to Sinuhe, his friend. Sinuhe might not receive him, now that he was a Hebrew. Well, that was on the lap of the gods. He was going to Sinuhe, his friend.

CHAPTER XXII

SINUHE came to the door of his villa. What he saw by the light of the torch which his faithful slave, and watchdog, Nar, held for him—his friend, Moses, plastered with mud and filth and half supporting, half carrying a naked and emaciated Hebrew slave—should have surprised him. But Sinuhe took it in his stride. With scarcely more than a lifted eyebrow, he invited Moses within. Moses stared at him strangely.

"I am a Hebrew," he said bluntly.

"Well, is that any reason for standing out here, looking like the wrath of Amon and of Osiris, too?"

In that casual remark, knowing Sinuhe as he did, Moses read his answer. Tears of relief and of gratitude and of something which was deeper than either of these since it was in a vague way a recognition of the existence of the human kindness of which he had despaired, came into his eyes. He knew, however, that any display of emotion would be distasteful to his friend. With Nun leaning heavily upon him he followed Sinuhe through his bachelor villa, and out into the pleasant garden which sloped down to the river. It was the grey hour just before the dawn. Moses thought fleetingly of the morning, just three short weeks ago, when he had stood on the deck of his ship, triumphant and happy, a Prince of Egypt. But Time, he had discovered, knows only one direction. He followed Sinuhe into the summerhouse. They placed Nun in a chair.

"Now," said Sinuhe, "if you feel you can tell me about it——"

In the presence of Sinuhe's calmness and his acceptance of this situation as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world, the earthquake of emotion through which Moses had passed began to assume more normal proportions. Moses talked—but he talked lucidly, telling a connected story. His friend watched him with eyes which betrayed a lively intelligence of all which lay beneath the words he was saying. When he was done, Sinuhe remarked:

"You know, Moses, you really have no problem at all, or at least, only minor ones."

Moses stared at him.

"Not if you put a curb on that forthrightness of yours," explained Sinuhe. He fingered the lobe of his left ear, a habit with him when he was thinking hard. "Hasn't it occurred to you that the Princess will not dare to tell the Pharaoh that

you are a Hebrew?" he asked. "It's quite evident that the Pharaoh doesn't know that particular fact. Well, with the Pharaoh almost a maniac in his hatred of anything Hebrew, how do you think he would react if Bint-Anath came to him and told him that, in spite of knowing his feelings on the subject, she had adopted a Hebrew child and concealed it from him? It would mean an end to her influence, her power. She would be laughed at, too, by all the court. The Princess Bint-Anath hates ridicule as much as she loves power. No, Moses, she was simply trying to frighten you into sending Tharbis away. You can keep Tharbis. You can keep your command, too. The Princess will not dare to say a word."

"But I am a Hebrew! Not an Egyptian. A Hebrew—a slave!"

"What difference does that make?" Sinuhe asked equably. "You are no different from what you were yesterday, are you? It isn't what you are but what people think you are that matters, Moses. So long as no one knows you are a Hebrew, and everyone thinks you are an Egyptian, that's all that matters."

It did seem absurdly simple the way Sinuhe put it. Moses looked at Nun, to whom neither of them had been paying any attention. They would both, indeed, have been surprised if they had known how much he had comprehended.

"What will we do with him?" Moses asked.

"You say you flung the body into the river?"

"Yes. And the crocodiles took it. I saw them."

"Good. That means there is no evidence. There may be talk and a search for Azkim. But, without any evidence, it will blow over. All we have to do is to dispose of this man."

"What happens to me doesn't matter," Nun said, speaking slowly and painfully.

Sinuhe thought to himself that it would be better if Nun, too, were put out of the way, painlessly; but he knew Moses too well to suggest it.

"You were on your way to Goshen, weren't you?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"Then, I'll see you get to Goshen. A boat—or a chariot. You needn't worry, Moses. It's best to remove him at once from the vicinity. I'll look after him."

"If I could only tell you how grateful I am——" Moses began.

"Don't," Sinuhe said. "We're friends, aren't we? That's enough." He paused. "By the way, when will the formal announcement about the command be made?"

"I don't know. Some time today, I suppose."

"Once that is made, you will be entirely safe. There's still one problem, though."

Moses looked at him.

"Rumours that can be traced back to the Princess Tiyy and Merneptah," Sinuhe explained, crossing one leg over another. "I thought of mentioning them to you yesterday. Not definite, you understand. But remarks that it was very strange surely that, while you were an adopted son and no one knew who your parents were, you had a Hebrew woman for a nurse. They even mentioned her name, Jochebed. The question is, how much do they know? It's clear that they haven't any real evidence. But I heard a rumour that Tiyy's steward was searching for that nurse of yours. Baal-Hanan is subtle. Now, if he were to find Jochebed, it might be serious. You don't know where she is, do you?"

"I know where your mother is," Nun said unexpectedly.

They stared at him in surprise.

"In the Street of the Dog, in Avaris," Nun, who had seen exactly what Sinuhe was driving at, went on. "Your brother, Aaron, is called Hadad, Moses."

Sinuhe crossed his legs carefully. He said:

"How do you know all this? I mean, you evidently know all the facts about Moses' parentage."

Nun smiled. "Back in Memphis in the old days I was Jochebed's physician. I was also a friend to Amram."

"I see." Sinuhe thought for a moment. "How many of the other Hebrews know of this—I mean about Moses' parentage?"

"A few." Nun straightened a little. "Those who were intimate friends of the family—and survived the terror. Among the main mass of the Hebrews there is also, a vague legend that Moses is of Hebrew blood. But only a few know who his parents really are."

"I see."

Nun drew himself quite erect, painfully. "But you need have no fear," he said, speaking directly to Moses, "that any Hebrew will ever divulge your secret—at least, not to an Egyptian—no, never to an Egyptian."

Sinuhe didn't like it. But, if others besides this slave knew the secret, it was of no use to do away with Nun. He put his chin in his cupped hand and leaned forward. "And Moses' family is now living in the Street of the Dog in Avaris, posing as Syrians—Hadad, I think you said the name was?"

"Yes."

"That is too close to be comfortable—with Tiyy sniffing around like a hunting dog." Sinuhe glanced at Moses. "Here is what you must do, some time today. Get into Avaris. See Jochebed. Warn her. She and her family had, in fact, better get out of Avaris. Or no, on second thought, it would be better if I went instead of you. You might be watched and followed. I'll see to it

myself, in person." He paused. "You are sure no evidence was left."

"Yes."

Sinuhe got up. "Well then, this is what you had better do. Get back to the palace. Change your clothes. Tell Tharbis you spent the night with me. Go about as usual. If the Princess speaks to you, give nothing away. I will take care of things."

It was beyond Moses' power to express what he felt. But he knew that Sinuhe understood the few stumbling words he said, just as he himself understood what Nun tried to tell him before he left. He went out of Sinuhe's villa a different man from the one who had entered. Tharbis, he was thinking, no longer despairingly but hopefully. Tharbis!

At this instant in her villa down the river Tiyy was laying down the law to her steward, Baal-Hanan.

"There must be no excuses," she was telling him. "That woman must be found. Today, if possible. Before the Pharaoh makes his formal announcement to the court. Must! Do you understand?"

At the same moment, down in Avaris, Jochebed was listening to the somewhat excited account Aaron was giving her of Moses' intervention on behalf of Nun as it had been reported to him by Jonathan. Jochebed's eyes were suffused with tears.

"You see, he isn't *all* bad," she murmured. "I always said he wasn't *all* bad."

Back in the palace the Princess Bint-Anath, after an uneasy night, got up from the couch on which she had not slept. It was already clear to her that she might have made a serious error. She had been so confident, at the moment, that the threat of informing the Pharaoh about his real parentage would be enough to bring Moses to heel that she had not looked any further—and, besides, for once rage had run away with her reason. She still expected that, when Moses thought the matter over, he would yield. But with a man like Moses one never knew. Suppose he did not yield? Suppose he refused to send Tharbis away? What, then could she do? As Sinuhe had guessed, when it came to the point, Bint-Anath hesitated at the thought of destroying herself and she could not, as yet, see any way of destroying Moses without destroying herself. It is, besides, difficult to pluck out an emotion which has possessed one for years, even if that emotion is rapidly souring into hatred. The Princess thought in vexation that if the young fool would only see reason, it would all be so simple. They could go back to where they had been before. She must try, once more, to make Moses see reason. Probably he would. But

if he wouldn't, why then she would make the best of a bad job. Wait until Moses went up to Naharin. Then, send for Bahri. "Sleep soft, Tharbis," she told herself viciously. "My time will come in one way or another."

As she told herself this, Moses was entering his rooms on tip-toe. Tharbis, fortunately, did not stir. Moses threw off his tunic and his kilt and removed his sandals, tossing them in a heap in a corner. The dawn, he noticed through the window, was coming. In its light he looked about for fresh clothes. Tharbis woke. She stretched like a kitten. She saw Moses, the ruddy light on his body. She held out her arms to him. She did not understand why, after a held moment, he came over to her with a rush and took her with a savage urgency, the urgency of a man who has believed himself to have lost the thing dearest to him in the world and has now had it, against all hope, restored to him. But she was quite content. There was one way to hold men—always. They were such boys, such greedy boys. She sighed comfortably.

After a while, lying in his arms, she stirred. She had been thinking, not thinking as Moses had been of the wonder of their union, but of other things, of men staring after her, of that Prince Merneptah—you could tell he was mad for her—a woman knew—and he was a son of the Pharaoh too, whereas Moses was only a grandson—besides, there was something physically attractive about him—and, then, by a natural sequence for her, of what she should wear today. This had brought another idea into her mind.

"Moses," she said.

"What is it, darling?"

"I saw some emeralds the other day. Up in Avaris."

Moses smiled. There was to him something deliciously childish, delightfully feminine, in his wife's preoccupation with adornment of herself.

"You'd like to have them? Is that it?"

"Mm—hmmm—m."

"Well, we'll get them for you."

"Oh, Moses! You're so good to me."

"Why shouldn't I be?"

Another pause. "Could we go to Avaris today?"

Moses thought rapidly. He knew that Sinuhe would not approve. Sinuhe had, in effect, advised him to stay away from Avaris until this had blown over, until Jochebed was out of the city. But then the chances against his running into Jochebed were a million to one. Besides there was in Moses something which rebelled at even a hint of skulking. Let spies follow him if they liked. He was a Prince of Egypt, was he not? Yes, in

spite of Merneptah and Bint-Anath he was still a Prince of Egypt, the commander-in-chief to Naharin. Why should he hide? Why should he be afraid?

"Very well, dear," he said.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE Pharaoh had anticipated that his action would set the cauldron seething. Not even he, however, was cognizant of all the activity which went on that day.

Nor was Moses cognizant of all that was going on. He knew that Sinuhe was busy. He suspected considerable activity on the part of Bint-Anath and of Merneptah. But he did not know that Baal-Hanan, the steward of the Princess Tiyy, was directing a squad of spies, not only to search Avaris but also to comb the surrounding region for information; or that Merneptah had his own men out, hunting for Azkim, mysteriously vanished while pursuing a Hebrew slave, called Nun, who had also mysteriously disappeared from view. Moses had, in fact, put his troubles under lock and key for the day, since, when he was with Tharbis, it was almost impossible for him to be interested in anything else. It is a measure, surely, of his infatuation that even to shop with her was a delight.

To a woman like Tharbis the emeralds, naturally, were both the final titbit and also an excuse for pillaging almost all the shops of Avaris. The chariot in which they had gone to the city was so packed with linens and bracelets and new mirrors and a beautifully modelled eagle with rubies for eyes and a hundred other things that the charioteer had scarcely room to stand by the time they turned down the street in which Tharbis said she had seen the emeralds. Neither from Amon nor from Yahweh did Moses receive any premonition. He was, indeed, too intent in helping Tharbis down from the chariot and in watching the happy excitement in her face to notice what street it was or anything else. No impression was made on him by the peculiar look on the face of the tall, somewhat stoop-shouldered man who rose to greet them as they entered. He watched Tharbis as she exclaimed over the emeralds and tried them on and asked him how they looked. He might, indeed, have gone out again and been none the wiser, if, at that instant, some trick of fate or more truthfully, her own interest in the business had not brought Jochebed in. Even then, for a moment, Moses was only conscious of her as a vague entity in the background until a certain peculiar

intensity about her sudden stillness drew his attention to her. He looked. He could not believe what he saw. He moved a step towards her like a man in a trance and then took another.

"Aunt Jochebed!" he exclaimed.

Aaron looked swiftly about him. He glanced into the street. There was no one there, no one except Moses' charioteer, waiting in the chariot and an idler in the shop front two doors down. Tharbis, who was busy with the emeralds, glanced up in surprise. Jochebed's exclamation was like a long sigh breathed out:

"Moses!"

The years had rushed back for Moses. He was a child again and Aunt Jochebed—no, *Mother* Jochebed was saying: "You won't forget me, Moses. Promise you won't forget me."

"I know," he said, taking another step towards her. "I know."

She did not need to ask what he knew. It was in his eyes, his bearing. She opened her arms. He came into them. Tharbis fingered the emeralds impatiently. She had no comprehension of what this was all about nor was she interested. What interested her was that Moses hadn't paid for the emeralds yet. She put down the emeralds and picked up a fan of plumes, in which ostrich plumes were set off by flamingo feathers and of which the handle, turning at right angles to itself, was of ivory inlaid with gold.

"How did you come to know?" Jochebed asked. "Who told you?"

"The Princess, Aunt—Mother." Moses paused. "It was her way of trying to compel me to send Tharbis—my wife—away."

"Oh."

"Can I have this, too, Moses?"

It was Tharbis speaking. It recalled Jochebed, suddenly, to the present and its danger. She released Moses, almost pushing him away. He, too, came to realization. He stepped back and looked about him. Aaron, keenly alive to the situation, did his best to obscure it for Tharbis.

"I'll make you a special price, my lord," he said. "A very special price."

Moses came back to Tharbis. He glanced at the fan.

"Whatever you say," he told Aaron, not looking at him.

Tharbis exclaimed in delight. Still holding the fan, she picked up the emeralds, tried to clasp them on, couldn't, and turned to Moses to help her. His fingers were all thumbs. But he got the necklace around her neck.

"Now, if you'll run out to the chariot, I'll be along in a moment," he said to her. "After I've paid for them."

She did not need a second invitation. She went out, and it was obvious to all of them that her mind was on the jewels and her

new fan and that she had no room for any other thought. Jochebed said hastily:

"You can't stay but a moment, Moses."

"How is my—my father?"

"Not well, Moses. Not at all well. He had another stroke eleven days ago. But don't worry about him, Moses. Look to yourself. Be careful."

"You'd better go," Aaron advised. "Your friend Sinuhe was here. An hour ago. We're moving back to Tanis. Yes, you'd better go. It's dangerous for all of us."

"We heard what you did for Nun, the physician," Jochebed said, her eyes shining.

"Yes, we heard," Aaron agreed. A certain warmth came into his voice. For a man who helped the Hebrews, no matter who he was, Aaron felt kindness. "That brute, Azkim, he deserved all he got."

"I'll do more," Moses promised, "now that I know who I am."

"Moses!" Tharbis called. "Are you coming?"

"Go," Jochebed entreated. "Your wife will be wondering. Go."

"Good-bye—Mother!"

"Good-bye, my—my son."

He went out. He was smiling as he got into the chariot, feeling, without realizing just why, that a part, at least, of the falsity of his position had been removed. He took the reins from the charioteer. It was not until the whip was in his hand that something which must have been in his subconscious mind ever since he had heard Azkim's name recurred to him. The whip! Azkim's whip. He had flung the body into the river. But the whip! He could see it lying there. He must get Tharbis back to the palace. He must get that whip.

CHAPTER XXIV

DARKNESS had fallen. Moses was plodding back to the palace. His face, if one had been able to see it, was drawn and tense. To get away from Tharbis and out of the palace without anyone asking where or why he was going had not been easy. To approach the place where he had fought with Azkim had been nerve-racking, especially since in the meantime it had come to his ears that, at Merneptah's command, an extensive search was in progress for the missing overseer. He was, too, conscious at last of all the seething currents boiling beneath the surface of the court.

And then after he had with infinite caution rediscovered the place, there had been no whip. He had searched every inch of the ground. He had extended the search, going in ever-widening circles until, at last, he had realized that he was far from any possible place where the whip might have been flung. But still there was no whip.

This had been one shock. Another was to come. On his way back he had passed a place where a squad of Hebrew slaves under the supervision of an overseer had been set to build a landing place for a villa which was to be constructed. The sun had just set. The Hebrews, relieved of their work, had sat down to eat the provisions they had brought with them—all except two. Two of them, who had each snatched at a knucklebone one of the guards had tossed out, were fighting the matter out, rolling over and over on the ground like dogs; while some distance away the guards and the overseer were sitting, watching the fun and laughing. Yesterday Moses would have passed them by without a glance. Today, it seemed to him, abruptly, in his worried and irritated state, that it was pitiful that these two of his own race, not content with the blows the Egyptians gave them, should fight like animals over a worthless bone. He stopped and pulled off the man on top, cursing him for a fool and commanding them both to stop it. One of them, breathing hard, snarled under his breath.

"What, Moses! Will you kill us as you killed Azkim?"

It had been like a thunderbolt. Moses had not said another word. Turning, he had hurried off as if the jackals of Anubis were on his tail. How could they have known? he was asking himself now. Did they really know? If they did, then did not everybody know? What a fool's dream he had been living in! And what might not have happened at the palace while he was gone? Sinuhe—he had not seen him. Perhaps he had been discovered while sending Nun away. Nor had he seen the Princess. Perhaps she had gone to the Pharaoh. Or, perhaps, Tiyy and Merneptah had found Jochebed. What a fool he had been to leave the palace. He should not have bothered about the whip. He realized that now when it was too late.

There was a desperate urgency upon him and a desperate realization also that the rest of his life would be like this, living a lie, listening to every chance remark and wondering if, perhaps, there was some sinister meaning behind it. To a man of Moses' proud and somewhat arrogant temperament, a man who had always been accustomed to walk with his head high and to speak out forthrightly, it was an almost intolerable prospect. Yet what else could he do? His own situation demanded the deceit.

Above all, if he wanted to keep Tharbis and to protect her, he must learn to play the game of trickery not only against the Pharaoh and Merneptah and all the nobles of the court, but also against the woman he had believed to be his mother and whom he had adored and for whom, in spite of their quarrel and in spite of his realization now of the other side of her character, the ugly, evil, rotten side, he still felt affection.

But it was Tharbis who was chiefly in his mind at this moment, Tharbis, whom he loved with an intensity made more terrible by the fear of losing her, Tharbis, who, so he thought in the foolishness of his idealized illusion of her, loved him as he loved her. He pictured her waiting for him. He imagined her anxious about him, wondering where he was. He hastened his steps.

At this moment, Tharbis was standing in the great entrance hall of the palace. There was a crowd around and a general air of excitement since the Pharaoh, abruptly, had summoned his court in the late afternoon to announce to them formally the appointment of Prince Aahmose as commander-in-chief of the expedition to Naharin and had then, just as abruptly, dismissed them.

It was this event which was keeping the ladies and the nobles of the court from dispersing to their evening meal. Every man and woman there was watching Merneptah and Tiyy and Bint-Anath to see what they might do and say, and commenting also on the peculiar absence of Moses. All day, indeed, rumours of a spectacular quarrel between him and Bint-Anath—over Tharbis it was said—and of some startling information which Tiyy and Merneptah had unearthed about Moses had been flitting from mouth to mouth and gaining every hour in exaggeration. The older people, as Bint-Anath, standing cold and controlled, knew, had already resurrected the ancient scandal surrounding the circumstances of her adopting Moses; while the younger were all agog over the story of his clash with Azkim, Merneptah's overseer. It appeared now that this overseer had disappeared. Could Moses have had something to do with that?

This was the question—along with others—which was being asked and Bint-Anath could sense about her an atmosphere of impending crisis. It made her very wary. Just how much of all this had got to the Pharaoh's ears, she did not know. But this sudden proclamation of Moses' appointment made her particularly uneasy. From long experience she recognized that it was quite in character for Rameses to fling an announcement like this abruptly into the midst of a turmoil and then withdraw to see what explosion might occur. Though, she told herself, watching the sharp, eager face of Tiyy, the very fact of the announcement proved, at least, that the Pharaoh had no suspicion

of the real truth—that Moses was a Hebrew. Not even to gain an effect would the Pharaoh have risked appointing a Hebrew slave to an important command, since to do so would be to make himself ridiculous in the eyes of all Egypt. The danger of that discovery, except, perhaps, for Tiyy, need not be reckoned with. But Bint-Anath wished—wished with all her heart and soul—that she had not lost her temper the night before. She could not think where her brains had been, she told herself. It was Tharbis' fault, the slut. She transferred her glance to her. Before Tharbis had thrust herself into Moses' life, everything had been going perfectly, Bint-Anath observed to herself viciously. And Moses, apparently was not going to yield. He had not been near her all day. Well, when this danger was safely over, and Moses was away in Naharin, she would attend to Tharbis; yes, if it was the last thing she did.

Tharbis, on her side, comparatively unversed as yet in the Egyptian court, had no definite idea of what was going on about her. The proclamation about the command had pleased her. It showed that she had, quite clearly, made a good choice in her husband, since it was now abundantly evident that he had an assured position in court; and, in addition, part of her mind had reflected, without going any further for the moment into the possibilities thus suggested, that Moses would be away for some time in Naharin. Nor had it escaped her peculiarly feminine perceptions that neither Bint-Anath nor Tiyy was pleased by the announcement. She could see both of them looking at her now and she set her chin just a little higher and assumed a disdainful air.

Tharbis, however, was not particularly interested in these two or, for that matter, in any of the ladies of the court except in so far as she kept watching to see if they had noticed her new gown of linen so fine that it was like a tenuous mist and the fan she was holding and the emeralds around her neck. She was, indeed, beautiful tonight in that brightly lighted hall, her dusky body divined through the gossamer robe like the soft approach of night. She knew it. She collected the glances of the women and the sly, bold stares of the men like a goddess gathering incense, and it pleased her that, even when they were all excited about something, they couldn't help looking at her. It was true that Merneptah was not paying his usual attention to her. Merneptah seemed to be deeply agitated. He was talking loudly to the group immediately about him.

This disappointed her. So did the fact that the Pharaoh was not present. Sinuhe, her husband's friend, however, she noticed, was standing a little apart, and Tharbis remembered

that she was a trifle piqued by the casual indifference he had displayed towards her in these last three weeks. Had it been a careful indifference she would have understood and would have been flattered. A casual indifference, however, was another matter. She sidled over to him.

It was at this moment that a weary and worried Moses came up the broad steps and stepped into the lighted hall. He stopped, blinking in the light. There was a warning bell in his head, seeing the group gathered there and all abruptly silent, all looking at him. Then he saw Tharbis. Courage returned to him. His chin went up. He stepped forward. Inevitably, as in a shadow show, Merneptah stepped out to meet him.

"You come in late, Aahmose, Prince of Egypt."

Harassed though he was by the wonder as to what might have happened, the old familiar thrill of anger went through him. He stared at Merneptah, hating the bulging, staring eyes, the coarse, insensitive lips, the somewhat heavy jowls.

"I fail to see how that is any concern of yours."

"You were not by any chance looking"—Merneptah flashed out his hand from behind him—"for this?"

It was Azkim's whip. An acute sense of danger rang shrill in Moses' brain. From the corner of his eye he saw Tharbis looking at him. He must battle cleverly—for her.

"That?" he replied. "It seems to be a whip."

"Yes, a whip. The whip of Azkim, my head overseer. See, his mark is burned into the handle. Azkim himself is not to be found. What have you to say to that, Prince Aahmose?"

Moses shrugged his shoulders. "Why should I say anything?" he demanded contemptuously. "He is your overseer, not mine."

"Yes, he is mine. And my men found the signs of a struggle where the whip was found and footprints sunk deep into the mud leading to the river."

"This is interesting. Why tell me?"

"Because," Merneptah rushed on, his head thrust forward, "the Hebrew slave he was pursuing has also disappeared, the Hebrew you saved from justice yesterday. Also because one of my men saw in the darkness this morning a man coming from that direction carrying or leading another man. What have you to say to that, Prince Aahmose?"

Merneptah might suspect. But he didn't know. Moses was abruptly convinced of this. Had Merneptah known there would have been a blunt accusation, not this elaborate, clumsy circumlocution. He knew a great relief. At the same time, rage sprang up in him. He let it have its way, enjoying the feel of it

after the turmoil of the night and the day, almost tasting it. His hand went to the hilt of his dagger.

"Why inquire of me?" he demanded savagely. "Have you any accusation to make?"

"Well," Merneptah began uncertainly. "Well——"

"Because you are a Hebrew lover," the Princess Tiyy cut in sharply. "You had a Hebrew woman for a nurse."

"Why not?" Bint-Anath's cold voice spoke. It was time, she saw, for her to protect herself. "It was with the Pharaoh's consent. Do you, Tiyy, dare accuse the Pharaoh of being a Hebrew lover?"

"And do you dare, any of you, to accuse me of slaying Azkim?" Moses asked fiercely. He ground his teeth, looking about him. "Do you dare, Merneptah?"

"Your nurse was a Hebrew," Merneptah muttered, holding on to the thing he knew. "A dog of a Hebrew."

"What has that to do with it? My—the Princess has already answered that."

"She was a dog of a Hebrew," repeated Merneptah, obstinately.

Moses had been through too much either to think clearly or to control his temper. His self-control broke.

"She was as good a woman as any of you," he flung at Merneptah fiercely, the face of Jochebed before his mind's eye. "Better than most of you. And now give way, Merneptah. Give way before I cut the lies out of you."

Merneptah fell back. Moses felt a fierce exultancy. He had won.

"And by the ram's horns of Amon," he added, driving the dagger which he had partly drawn back into its sheath, "the Pharaoh shall hear of this. The Pharaoh, my grandfather, shall hear of how you accuse the commander-in-chief of the army of Egypt."

That last phrase in the presence of all the court cut Merneptah to the quick.

"And by the demons of Set, the Hebrews you love," he howled, "shall pay for the death of Azkim. You saved one from impalement. Ten—no, a hundred—shall be impaled—men and women both. There are other things, too; other things my guards shall do, things worse than impalement. By Bes and by Set, the Hebrews shall suffer."

A great light seemed to be blazing in Moses' brain. The sight of Simeon on his pole came back to him. Other sights, too, sights he had seen—men buried to their necks in the hot sand, women's bodies in agony. This was what he was letting loose upon his people, his mother's people. Vile, to let them suffer whilst he

himself went free. Yes, they were his people. He was surprised to find himself feeling this. He was surprised also to hear his own voice speaking as if from a great way off.

"I killed Azkim," he was saying.

He could hear the stunned silence. Realization of what he had done began to come to him. But it was not irretrievable. He cast about in his mind, trying to think. Merneptah was on him, triumphant.

"You killed Azkim! Why? Why did you kill him?"

"Why should I not?" Moses retorted, his confused mind striving to keep up with the pace of events and his swirling emotions interfering. "He was beating a Hebrew to death."

"A Hebrew!" Merneptah roared, appealing to all the court.

"He pities a Hebrew!"

"Why not? Hebrews, too, are men. They think like men, feel like men, suffer like men. I know."

"How do you know?" Tiyy hissed at him suddenly. "How do you know, bastard?"

"Because I, too, am a Hebrew," Moses shouted at her, his face flushing red. "Nor am I a bastard. Do you hear? I am not a bastard." And then, in the hiss of indrawn breath, in the exultancy on Tiyy's face, in the incredulity on Merneptah's countenance, followed almost immediately by an expression of savage, overwhelming triumph, he knew what he had done. He glanced this way and that. He saw the look of cold, concentrated fury on Bint-Anath's face. He saw Sinuhe staring at him as if he could not believe his ears. And then he saw Tharbis looking about in wonder. His dagger flashed out. "And now," he cried at Merneptah, "will you lay hands on me? Will any of you lay hands on me? By Am—no, by Yahweh, I will cut the heart out of any man who tries."

They fell back from him, staring at him for one long moment. Then: "Fool!" Bint-Anath hissed; and: "The Pharaoh, Merneptah!" Tiyy shrieked. "Let us to the Pharaoh! At once!"

The words broke the tension. There was an excited stir of movement and of babble and then, suddenly, a rush following Tiyy towards the back of the palace, towards the stairs to the balcony on which at this hour the Pharaoh always sat. Moses put back his dagger. He was aware of Sinuhe at his side.

"Flee, Moses," Sinuhe was saying. "You must flee at once."

But Moses scarcely heard him. Nor did he, except vaguely, see Bint-Anath, after one long contemptuous glance at him, turn and walk steadily away, knowing that her world had crashed about her but still preserving her pride and her dignity. Moses' gaze was fixed on Tharbis, Tharbis standing and staring at him

with a puzzled, wondering expression on her face. Of her, at least, he had no doubts. She, at least, loved him, as he loved her. He walked up to her and his voice was very tender:

"I'm sorry, darling. I shouldn't have. I lost my temper—and my wits, too. Now, we'll have to go."

"Go! Why should we go?"

"You heard. I am a Hebrew, not an Egyptian. It is dangerous for us to stay here longer. Don't worry, darling. I'll look after you."

"You mean, you're not a Prince of Egypt?"

"No. I never was."

"You haven't much time to waste, Moses," Sinuhe reminded him. "It will take that mob a little time to make it clear to the Pharaoh. When Rameses does get it clear, he will act fast."

"Do you mean you'll have to leave the palace?" Tharbis asked.

"Yes. I'm a Hebrew, a Hebrew," he hesitated and brought out the word, "slave. But we'll escape somewhere—to Canaan or Syria or the desert. I'll look after you."

Tharbis had the essentials straight in her mind now. It was clear that her husband, whom, a few moments ago, she had believed impregnable and magnificent in his position and able to give her anything she wanted, had suddenly become anathema, despised, a fugitive. She did not know what his fate would be. But her instinct told her that her life with him would be uncomfortable and dangerous. That was all Tharbis needed to know.

"I'm not going," she said.

Moses stared at her, thunderstruck. Then, he thought that she did not really understand.

"Dearest——" he began.

"I'm not going," she repeated.

"Moses," Sinuhe said, glancing anxiously towards the back of the palace.

"You don't understand, dear," Moses said tenderly, taking her arm. "We have to go, both of us. You wouldn't want to stay here without me, would you? And I can't stay." He forced a smile to his lips. "I can't leave you here alone, darling. What would you do without me?"

Tharbis had already formed a good idea of what she would do. Tharbis had remembered Merneptah's eyes upon her. And Merneptah, as Bint-Anath had pointed out, was a son—not a grandson—of the Pharaoh. She looked at Moses' hand. She took it with her own, calmly and definitely removed it and stepped back.

"Good-bye, Moses," she said.

Realization began to come upon him. But he could not believe.

"You can't mean that!" he exclaimed, taking a step towards her. "Not if you love me. And you love me, of course. Think, Tharbis. Think of our love, our union——"

"Our times were lovely," Tharbis said. "But they are over now."

Moses gaped at her.

"Come, Moses," Sinuhe began again.

"By all the demons of Set," Moses shouted. "By——"

"Come, Moses," Sinuhe repeated. He took his friend by the arm. "By good luck my chariot is at the gates."

"Then you don't love me!" Moses cried at Tharbis. "You never loved me. You only pretended—for what you could get out of it. And your eyes on other men! On Merneptah, yes, on Merneptah, too! I see it now. You slut! You—you whore!"

He was tiresome, Tharbis thought, tiresome and not nice. As if any man, any reasonable man, could expect a girl to give up all this luxury and flee to the desert. The desert! She knew the desert. And now to call her names! And she had been nice to him. She had told him their times together had been lovely. What more could he expect? Besides, he couldn't hurt her—not he, a Hebrew—a Hebrew slave. Well, if he wasn't going to be sensible, if he was determined to be nasty about a parting which could have been kept nice . . .

Turning on her heel, every line in her shapely back breathing of offended dignity, she walked away. Moses took a step after her. Sinuhe pulled him back.

"We haven't a moment," Sinuhe said.

Dazed, stumbling, not knowing or caring what happened to him, Moses let Sinuhe lead him to the door.

"Forget her," Sinuhe advised him, taking him as rapidly as he could to the gates of the palace. "I could have told you before—if you hadn't been so mad after her. She's just a common woman. Mad after men. Anyone can have her if he sets about it the right way. She's not worth bothering about, I tell you. She's——"

But Moses did not hear him. "Tharbis!" he was muttering as Sinuhe pushed him into the chariot. "Tharbis!"

CHAPTER XXV

HE stood in the house in the Street of the Dog. He was still dazed, uncomprehending. Jochebed's heart was torn within her. Miriam looked on sombrelly. Aaron fussed about, talking

with Sinuhe, making hurried preparations for departure. They had agreed that, since Avaris was on the eastern border of Egypt, the only road for escape lay out from Egypt into Sinai. Moses, a grandson of the Pharaoh would have no trouble getting past the frontier guards if he hurried. Sinuhe had written a letter to his friend, Harmhab, who was in command of the fort at the turquoise mines at Sinai. Aaron, on a chance, had put in a token which would find him favour with some of the desert tribes with whom he had dealt in the way of trade. He mentioned two or three of the names of their chiefs, insistently.

Moses gave no sign that he heard. He did not, in fact, hear. The final collapse of his world had come and what happened to himself was of no interest to him. He was a puppet, shoved around hither and thither by the people who cared for him, himself not caring. Whatever they did was satisfactory to him.

"And now, just a word with your father," Jochebed said. "I've told him you're here."

Moses followed like an automaton. He walked into the back room. He stared down at the frail, flushed face. He saw the trembling arms raised up to him, heard the voice faltering out:

"My son! My son!"

A momentary flash of recognition was vouchsafed to him. He fell to his knees, gathering Amram in his arms.

"Father!" he said.

In after years Moses had one other recollection of that night and only one. It was when he passed the frontier of Egypt. He drew up his horses. He turned back and looked at Egypt. He flung up his fist and shook it, cursing the Pharaoh, cursing Bint-Anath, cursing Merneptah, cursing Egypt, cursing the gods of Egypt, cursing Tharbis.

"I will return to take vengeance on you," he stammered. "On all of you. By Set and by Amon, I will return."

BOOK II
GOD OF SINAI
(1240-1223 B.C.)

IN 1225 B.C. MERNEPTAH SUCCEEDS RAMESES

CHAPTER I

HEAT boiled in the lifeless wadi. It smote from above. It flashed back in a million dagger points from the flinty, crumbling shale. It shimmered in nauseating waves from the tortured ridges on either side. High up in the brassy sky the vultures hovered, waiting.

That for which they waited did not realize them. Face cracked and blackened, eyes staring and bloodshot, tongue protruding thickly between lips that were cracked and swollen and circled by a grey line, Moses stumbled forward. His feet were torn and bleeding. There was a bowstave clenched in a cut and blood-stained hand. Moses could not have told you why his hand clutched the bowstave. Nor could he have told you how many days it was since, half-mad in his despair and agony, he had turned off the main road from Egypt to Canaan and had plunged southward past the shallow lakes and the Sea of Reeds into the wilderness between the Narrow Sea and the wainscoted hills or at what further point, in panic at an approaching caravan, he had fled eastward up the mouth of a beckoning ravine. It had led him into this demoniacal land of sun-bright, brilliantly hued cliffs and sun-scorched, desolate wadis. Somewhere amongst them his horses had collapsed. At some point the realization had come to him that he was hopelessly lost.

Even that realization was now beyond him. There was no spark of intelligence flickering in that swollen face or in those red-rimmed, blood-veined eyes. There was only instinct, some instinct which kept him moving forward. At times, he would babble or try to babble. At times, he would stare at the floating, tantalizing mirages, moving up and down like the prancing hooves of horses in the bright, heat-ridden air. At times he would see, or would think he saw, the green cool fields of the Northland with the shimmer of water in the canals or Memphis and the broad placid river flowing past it. And Tharbis would be standing

there, waist-deep, holding out her arms to him. But when, croaking inarticulately, he would stretch out his arms and try to run towards her and the life-giving, the thirst-slaking water and would hurl himself into its cool depths, he would fall through it and there was only the hard, the barren shale of the desert. He would sob then, the pitiful sobs of a hurt child, though no tears came. He would lie there a little. The vultures would drift lower like burnt and blackened scraps of papyrus floating in the sky. But below them, Moses would pull himself up to his knees, propping himself on his bowstave. He would get to his feet again. He would stagger forward once more.

It seemed, indeed, to the vultures, wise in the ways of living things lost in this wilderness, that soon this dot which they watched would no longer move forward, that soon when it stumbled and fell, it would not rise again. But somehow Moses lived through the midday heat. In some inexplicable fashion, as if there were a power stronger than instinct which pulled him on he moved forward. The afternoon waned. He came to the end of the valley. A low, stony ridge closed it. Moses went up it on his hands and knees. He crossed into the next wadi. It was long and twisting. Otherwise, however, it was like the one he had left. The same heat boiled in it. The same mirages shifted up and down like clashing rocks. The same fire-red and salmon-pink and dragon-green of the cliffs marched on either side. There was the same flinty shale, interspersed with patches of pink and yellow sand, beneath his feet.

Yet, when the sun dropped at last, reluctantly, behind the cliffs, Moses was still stumbling forward. He did not notice that it was cooler or that the wadi was widening. He had no eyes for the riot of the sunset colours above his head. But, just at dusk, he came round the shoulder of a cliff where the valley turned sharply to the right. His heat-tortured eyes saw, or thought they saw, palms feathering like plumes into the sky. The day had taught him nothing. There was a hoarse croak in his throat. He tried to hasten his steps. He saw pale lights among the trees. He saw, or thought he saw, wells and people by the wells. He broke into a horrible, staggering dog-trot. He came up to the wells. The people did not seem to notice him. They seemed to be quarrelling amongst themselves, a tall young man thrusting women back from the water and laughing as the other men laughed with him, and there seemed to be the bleating of goats and sheep in the air. Moses thought that he broke through the circle. He thought that he pushed the tall young man back. He thought he said:

"Let the women have water, dog. I, Aahmose, Prince of Egypt, command it."

This was what he thought. And then soft arms—were they the arms of Tharbis?—were around him and the water in the bowl at his lips was sweeter than all the wine of Egypt, and the face of the woman holding it was fairer than all the daughters of Egypt. He thought he told her so.

It was in this way that Moses came to the goats'-hair tents of Jethro, the priest of the Kenites. It was some time before he was conscious of anything. For a week he lay in alternating coma and delirium. When he first returned to consciousness it was day. His eyes took in the unfamiliar canopy of the tent above him. The thought occurred to him that he was on some campaign and it troubled him that he could not remember what campaign it was. It was too much effort to remember. He drifted back into slumber.

When he woke next his first awareness was of a woman in the tent. He lay and watched her for a moment or two. It seemed to him that he had seen her before somewhere. It was clear to him that he ought to rise and greet her. But when the purpose was communicated to his limbs they refused to answer. The head he tried to lift scarcely moved. He craned his neck a little and saw his hand lying along the coverlet. He could not believe it was his. It was a raven's claw, not a hand. Partial realization came to him. This was not a campaign. There had been heat—and a well—and a hand giving him water in a bowl. Then, where was he? Who was that woman? Why was he here, wherever it was?

He decided to ask the woman. He spoke. She did not seem to hear. He spoke again, not realizing that his voice was a whisper. But the tiny rustle of movement which he made attracted her attention. She looked over at the couch. She uttered a sharp exclamation. Coming over swiftly she put a hand on his forehead, pressing his head back on the pillow, speaking to him soothingly. He let her have her way, his nostrils wrinkling as they sensed an odour about her, unusual, but yet familiar. It seemed a great achievement when he identified it. It was the sourish-sweetish smell of cheese and of milk and of wool. At this moment the woman reached behind her to a rough block of wood and took a bowl from it. Lifting his head with the other hand she held it to his lips. Moses drank, his eyes still busy over the rim of the bowl with the broad brow and the grey eyes and the mass of hair, burnished and coppery where a shaft of light from the drawn-back flap of the tent fell on it. She spoke again when he had finished, stroking his brow. He frowned. It was not the tongue of Egypt. Well, then, where was he? How did he, Aah-

mose, Prince of Egypt, come to be here. And Tharbis? Where was Tharbis?

Tharbis! The name was like an explosion in his brain. In one breathless instant, recollection rolled back on him—Egypt, the Pharaoh, Bint-Anath, Jochebed, his flight. And Tharbis! Most of all, Tharbis, turning on her heel, away from him!

He thought he uttered a great cry. It was no more than a forcible expulsion of his breath. He fainted.

Zipporah imagined that he had fallen asleep again. She stood looking down at him. In this moment, with no one by to see, there was the brooding tenderness of the eternal mother in her eyes. A lock of curly hair had fallen forward over this stranger's face. She brushed it back gently and the touch of her fingers on his brow was a caress. She studied the thin, ravaged face, the pale hollows visible under the soft, curling beard, the sunken eyes, the blue-veined temples. Asleep thus, he was at her mercy, as he had been constantly this past week. Her knowledge of Egyptian was fragmentary, but from his babblings and from what her father said she had gathered that he was a fugitive from the court of Egypt, belonging to a life which was so entirely outside her experience that the picture she had formed of its magnificence and its marvels was coloured like a child's tales of genies and afrits and wonders of every kind. Why he had been forced to flee was incomprehensible to her. She had not been able to pierce together his broken utterances about Bint-Anath and Merneptah and Jochebed and the Pharaoh into any connected story; indeed, how could she, a girl who had always lived with the tribe in the wilderness of Sinai? But Zipporah had also had glimpses, as when a veil is tossed aside by the wind, of a suffering and a tragedy so intense that it had almost driven this handsome stranger mad; and that tragedy was centred around some woman—Tharbis, he seemed to call her—by whom he had either been betrayed or from whom he had been separated against his will.

Whichever it was, it was this last which appealed to her woman's sympathy and also aroused her devouring curiosity. Her father, who every now and then came to look at the young man, wanted to know exactly who he was and how he had come to be lost in the desert so far from Egypt and what it was which had driven him forth from the land of the Pharaoh. The obvious richness of the stranger's apparel and of the carved and inlaid bowstave and quiver he carried had also interested Jethro. He likewise asked himself why it was that this young man wore around his neck a token which Jethro recognized as the seal of Hadad, the wealthy merchant, of Tanis and Avaris, whose caravans occasionally travelled across Sinai to the land of the Midianites.

These things were of interest to Zipporah, too. Far more important to her, however, as she stood here, gazing down at Moses with the tenderness of a mother for the sick baby she has cared for, was the wonder as to what this young man would be like when he was better and how he would look upon her who had nursed him through a crisis through which no one had expected him to live.

Zipporah was sixteen. At sixteen in the desert a woman is full-grown and marriageable, indeed, has been marriageable for some time. But Zipporah for all her age was still a girl in emotions and perceptions. Yet Love is a crafty campaigner. He launches his dart when one's guard is down. He lies in ambush within the sick and the helpless. He creeps into one's heart when it is soft and tender through pity. By his seeming helplessness, he deceives.

Zipporah did not as yet know that she was in love, or at least, she would not have admitted it, even though her sisters were continually teasing her about the handsome stranger. But, as she stared at Moses, mingled with the tenderness was a sudden half-unexpressed wish that he would always stay like this, helpless, dependent on her. Fear of the future brushed its wings lightly over her. What might he not think of her when he was himself again, this young man whose tunic and kilt were of the finest weave, and whose dagger's hilt of ivory was inlaid with gold and jewels and whose every accent and gesture in delirium disclosed, or so she thought, the polish and the culture of the marvellous land of Egypt? What was she in comparison but a desert girl, brought up amongst flocks and herds, knowing nothing but flocks and herds and the rough life of the wilderness, the weaving, the lambing, the marches under the hot sun, the far loneliness of the stars, the crude joking and tussling with the young men around the wells? Barak, the strongest young man of the tribe, thought that she was fair in spite of her rough skin and her work-hardened hands and her face tanned by the sun. Barak saw nothing wrong with her. Barak wanted to marry her and become the son-in-law and heir of her father, the chieftain of the Kenites. But this young man, when he really came to himself, would she see scorn in his eyes or, worse, pity?

There was a trembling in her limbs. She was aware of sounds in the distance, the voices of women busy in the oasis, the shouts of children, the yelp of a dog. Putting the bowl back on the stand, she bent down and straightened the coverlet and tucked in a corner of it and drew up a fold over his shoulder. The stranger stirred and sighed. She heard him breathe: "Tharbis."

Jealousy stabbed at her. This Tharbis, who was she, where was she? She wasn't here, anyway. When he woke, he would find that his Tharbis, for whom he called so often, had never heard his cry. Some princess of Egypt, probably. Some beautiful, perfumed, disdainful woman of Egypt. Zipporah turned from the cot, knowing a fierce hatred and a desperate panic. When he woke, he would compare her to Tharbis. If she only knew how to change herself, better herself. Picking up the bowl, she stepped outside into the hot sun.

When Moses woke again, it was close to evening. He lay and looked at the tent. Outside he could hear the sounds of the wilderness, the bleating of sheep and goats and the barking of dogs, the voices of people, all touched with that faint sense of distance and unreality which sounds have in the emptiness of large, silent spaces almost as if one were dropping stones into a void. There was no undercurrent of restless, ceaseless sound as there is in cities or in cooped-up places.

This did not trouble Moses. His mind was more collected now. He listened to the gasping bray of a donkey and the bubbling roar of a he-camel, both pathetic in their protest against the silences. He was content to accept without wonder and without question that he had been picked up and taken care of by some desert tribe. The details were vague. He could remember leaving Egypt and driving along the road to Canaan until, in fear of pursuit, he had turned off to the South. He could recall the way in which he had plunged from the caravan route into the wilderness and even the point when his horses had collapsed and when he had first realized that he was lost. Beyond that there were only disjointed recollections.

All this did not worry him. Nor did it worry him that he was a homeless fugitive, dependent on the bounty of these barbarians, whoever they were. With remembrance had come hopelessness. To him, at this moment, sick and feeble and in despair, it seemed that his life was over, cut off as by a knife at that instant when he had crossed the frontier of Egypt. On the other side of that instant was Aahmose, the proud Prince of Egypt, the son of the Princess Bint-Anath and the grandson of the Pharaoh, a young man with no limits set to his possibilities and his future. On this side was Moses, a homeless, despised fugitive, a dog of a Hebrew into whose face any man could spit with impunity, a man with no future except scorn, with no potentialities except despair. Strange, he thought dully, that one instant could so lop off hope and promise and splendour and confidence from a man. And Tharbis—Tharbis, who had spurned him.

Tharbis! Even in his apathy the thought of her had power to hurt him. He had loved her so much, so deeply. He had believed in her so utterly. He groaned and, with an effort, turned to the wall. Only those who in this imperfect world have known unexpected betrayal by one whom they have loved blindly and unquestioningly and completely and, in their folly, have taken it for granted that that love was returned, can understand the agony through which he went as he lay there. There was the anguish of loss within him and the outrage of trust and the sick sense of helpless despair; and at the same time every nerve within him was conscious of the buzzing of the flies and the sound of the wind puttering around the walls of the tent and the thud of his own heart. He gasped in his pain. He moistened his dried lips. He said, "Tharbis" in a voice that was a groan. He rolled back again, wide eyes staring at the tent and noting dully a crude design in its weaving, two goats facing each other with a pillar between. In this moment he passed through the final abyss of suffering and the fire of that suffering burned itself into him indelibly.

There was no escape. He could not, as he had done that night in Egypt, gallop madly away. He could not now, as he had done on that night and on the succeeding days, curse the Pharaoh and Merneptah and Bint-Anath and Egypt and the gods of Egypt and Tharbis and swear that at some time he would return and take his vengeance. For he recognized now that this had been a hopeless boast. Besides, it no longer seemed to matter. Egypt, which he had loved, of which he had been so proud, had vomited him forth.

All these thoughts, however, were pale before the one central thought, the thought which in his weakness obsessed him. Tharbis, whom he had loved, whom he had adored, had shrugged him off as one shrugs off a robe which has begun to smell. And with whom was she now? His vision was cleared. He saw her shallowness, as Sinuhe had seen it, her cheapness, her incapability of being sincere or honest even with herself. He perceived how her eyes had always been looking this way and that among the men, collecting admiration as eagerly as a miser picks up gold, searching. Her eyes on Merneptah and Merneptah's eyes on her. And this was the woman he had worshipped! And he was helpless. He could not even punish her as she deserved to be punished. Moses groaned again. He writhed this way and that in the bed. But there was nothing he could do—nothing! After a while he became quiet. He stared straight up above him. He recognized that from this moment nothing mattered. His life was finished. So why protest? Tharbis, a woman, had

turned on her heel and left him. A woman! A bitter sneer curled his lip. A woman! Well, he was proof against women now. And Egypt had cast him out. His life was finished.

It was in this mood that he heard the tent flap lift and looked up. The woman he remembered was coming in. A smell of cooking came with her. With dull eyes Moses watched her drag the wooden block to his couch. But when the savoury steam of the stew of tender kid's flesh was in his nostrils, a faint gleam of interest awoke in him. He let the woman prop him in a sitting position. He wanted to help himself. She chided him gently in the language he did not understand, and pulling out a horn spoon from the folds of her dress, began to feed him. After the first mouthful he accepted the stew eagerly. The physical in him knew better than the mental what he needed. When it was finished he lay back and looked at the woman.

"Who are you?" he inquired.

She shook her head. Moses thought and repeated the question in the Hebrew tongue. The girl glanced at him for an instant. Then, getting up, she ran outside the tent. Moses wondered why. In a moment she came back with a tall, gaunt man whose grey streaked beard reached down to his waist and whose eyes, even in the half light of the tent, were keen and piercing. The man looked down at him and spoke in Egyptian. Moses listened. It was a strongly accented Egyptian. But he could make it out. He said:

"Who are you and where am I?"

The man rubbed the tip of his long, thin nose with his forefinger. "You dwell in the tents of Jethro, priest, and chieftain of the Kenites," he answered.

Moses thought. He had been in Canaan. But he had never been in Sinai. The Egyptians who had been there spoke of the Amalekites and the Midianities. He could not, however, recall the Kenites. He said so.

"The Kenites are of the seed of Midian who dwell on the further side of the gulf," Jethro told him. "But the Midianites forgot the true God who is our God. Generations ago they spewed us forth and now we range through Sinai, from the Holy Mount to the frontiers of Egypt. You were fortunate to find us this far north."

Moses did not care particularly whether he had been fortunate or not. His flash of interest was played out, and he was already feeling an all-pervading lassitude, an intense weariness. He did not realize that this was the inevitable result of his sickness. Zipporah did. She watched him anxiously as her father began to question the stranger, asking him who he was

and from whence he had come. Moses replied slowly, fighting off his weariness. His name was Moses, he informed Jethro. Yes, he had come from Egypt. Yes, he had been lost in the desert.

"Why did you leave Egypt?" Jethro demanded. "How did you come to be in this wadi, miles from the caravan route along the coast? Did you wander from the way?"

Moses hesitated, trying to decide what to tell and what not to tell. His mind seemed to be functioning slowly and still more slowly. Zipporah interrupted.

"Can't you see he is still weak, Father?" she asked. "Don't question him."

"I'd like to know."

"Wait till he's stronger," Zipporah insisted, trying to herd her father towards the entrance of the tent. "Wait until tomorrow."

Jethro looked down at her in amusement. Of his seven daughters, Zipporah was the one who reminded him most of her mother. She had the same managing ways, the same gentle obstinacy. He glanced back at Moses. It was clear that the young man was not yet well. It could wait until the morrow. Time is not of compelling importance in the desert. He went out.

Moses realized from her actions what Zipporah had said and done. Forgetting that she could not understand, he said feebly: "That was kind of you."

His eyes and the tone of his voice told her what he meant. She blushed and smiled at him and picked up the empty platter and put it outside and began to tidy up the tent. Moses lay and watched her.

CHAPTER II

MOSES had been driven out of Egypt. But the remembrance of him was like a drawn sword between two who had been mated in thought for years. As she stood with the Pharaoh in his garden Bint-Anath knew that she had lost. This, indeed, had already been spelled out for her in the past fortnight by the avoidance of her by her friends and sycophants, as if, she had thought with a bitter humour, she were plagued with leprosy, and by the open exultation of Tiyy and her circle. It had gained further point by the fact that, to win an interview with her father, she had had to put bribes into outstretched hands right and left, and to intercept him by surprise as he walked in his

garden. The Princess, however, had never been a woman to abandon a struggle so long as even the faintest of chances remained. There had still been a hope that, if she could see her father, the Pharaoh, some spark of that old communion and understanding between them might still exist to be fanned skillfully into a warming fire.

But now that she was with him, although as yet beyond the merest greeting, nothing but the one word "Moses" had been said, she knew the finality of defeat. Around them was the softness of the velvet Egyptian night, the river slipping by beyond the trees, the cries of night birds, the fragrance of flowers, the moon above the palms like some benignant, half-drunken god. Within herself the Princess knew the bleakness of despair. At her age, as with the Pharaoh, position and power were the chief things left to her, and the chances of these, as she stood here, were dissolving like bubbles in a goblet of wine. To have exposed her father to the world as one who had been tricked and deceived was, she perceived now clearly, the unforgivable sin. All else save the being held up to ridicule might be glossed over. But not that. An absolute ruler who wishes to be thought a god must remain infallible. No crack must be seen in the image of himself which he holds up for the world to worship and admire. Her own success of so many years ago was now her defeat.

So evident was this to her that the Princess did not even attempt to offer the explanations and the excuses with which she had come prepared. The Princess had her own courage and her own pride. She said:

"I came to tell you that I am leaving the court."

The Pharaoh did not answer.

"I will withdraw to my palace at Memphis," Bint-Anath stated proudly.

The Pharaoh understood what she was telling him. There did stir in him a certain cold regret. This daughter of his was the cleverest of his children, the one most like himself with just enough of the difference caused by sex to make her thoughts and ideas provocative and stimulating. He knew that he would miss the hours when, sitting by themselves, they had discussed the policy of Egypt or the intrigues of the court in a companionship made closer by their intuitive understanding of each other. He even felt an unfamiliar impulse to forgive, to speak and tell her to stay.

He stifled the impulse. At last, he was freed from her mother, that soft-voiced Syrian princess. And by Bint-Anath's own act. The page was rolled up. Though he would not rave at her as he had raved at those soldiers whom he had sent after Moses

but who had returned without him. Had they brought back that false grandson of his so that by the torturing and the death of him, his own dignity could have been re-established, the Princess would have been saved. As it was, Moses had escaped him. As it was, there was a little smile, instantly suppressed, on the faces of his courtiers when he approached, thanks to that formal announcement he had made. The Hebrews, too. Even as they died under the lash or on the stake their faces seemed to mock him. "A Hebrew as a grandson," their faces seemed to say. "You, the Pharaoh of Egypt—and a Hebrew for a grandson." No, that could not be forgiven. He said, just as coldly as the Princess had spoken:

"Perhaps, it would be better."

They did not say good-bye. The shadow of Moses, had he known it, stood between them. As the Princess walked away, the Pharaoh comprehended that the one single warmth in life which was left him, walked away with her. Pride is stronger than the death of life. The Pharaoh realized that with her going he would be delivered over to the obtuseness of Merneptah and the machinations of his mother. He could foresee the weariness and the boredom ahead. He may even have wished that he had never set in motion those impulses through which Moses had been discovered to be a Hebrew. But he did not call her back.

Bint-Anath walked away. Her head was high. But her spirit was dead within her. Moses was gone. Power was gone. And even Tharbis had escaped her. Yes, she could not even take vengeance on Tharbis—not in view of the protection Tharbis had found for herself. Tharbis, a Kushite girl, she thought with a strange twist to her lips, has defeated *me*—the Princess Bint-Anath—utterly.

But she kept her head high.

At this moment Tharbis lay in Merneptah's bed. Part of her recognized that this man was neither as pleasing nor as youthful nor as tenderly adoring as Moses had been. She had really been fond of Moses. But a girl has to look out for herself, and Tharbis knew intuitively that she had done well. Like a cat she had fallen on her feet. This man was mad for her, and his brutality and obtuse selfishness was the sort of thing to which Tharbis instinctively responded. Yes, she had fallen on her feet. And, in the meantime there was Sinuhe, that friend of Moses. Now that Moses was gone, perhaps he wouldn't be quite so casual. She'd get new gowns, hosts of them, and jewellery. She'd see if she couldn't awaken him to a consciousness of her. She'd get more

than a casual glance from him. Yes, life would always be exciting as long as there were men—and who the man was didn't matter much—provided that he was a man who attracted her. For, as Tharbis was often to tell others, she wasn't common. The man had to be a man who attracted her.

Sinuhe, however, was not thinking of Tharbis. Lying in his pleasure boat on the river and listening to the liquid drip of the oars while a half-nude girl crouched beside him, playing softly on the lyre, and leaning towards him, her great eyes languishing, the cake of perfume resting on her garlanded head smelling sweetly in his nostrils, he was, to the onlooker, the picture of sybaritic luxury. But his mind, as usual, was working keenly. When Moses had fled there had been those who had advised Sinuhe to gather his possessions and flee up to Syria before the Pharaoh's wrath should turn itself about and descend on him. Sinuhe had smiled politely at the advice. To attempt to flee, would, he was certain, be not only to vacate the protection flung around him by the power and long lineage of his family. It would also draw the attention of the Pharaoh to himself. The cat pounces when the mouse stirs. Not that Sinuhe had behaved like a mouse. He had been almost insolent in the casual way in which he had appeared at court just as if he had not been the most intimate friend of Moses and one who was more than suspected of complicity in his escape. True, he had not spoken in defence of Moses. He had only smiled and looked Merneptah in the eyes until the baleful, opaque stare of the Pharaoh's son had wavered and shifted. In his high, patrician manner Sinuhe had over-ridden the immediate danger.

He was, however, intelligent enough to know that danger still lurked. The Pharaoh had been prevented from striking openly. But there was a more dangerous side to this Rameses the Great. There was in him the ability to wait for months, or years, at need, until his victim had been lulled to complacency and a misstep. At that moment the Pharaoh would smite viciously. Merneptah could be discounted. Merneptah had the obstinacy of a weak man if his mind became set. On most matters, however, not being able to trust his own judgment, he wavered this way and that, influenced by the last person who spoke to him. But not the Pharaoh. It might be wiser, Sinuhe considered thoughtfully, now that the immediate peril had been outfaced, to approach his uncle, Intef, the vizier, and have himself assigned to some distant expedition, some frontier duty. It would be a nuisance. Life went very well as it was. Yet life, even on the frontier, was better than no life at all.

The girl—she was the dancing girl to whom he had been attracted—had put her lute down and was gazing at him expectantly. Sinuhe noted with the appreciation of a connoisseur the rounded shapeliness of her breasts, dusky with shadows in the moonlight. He put out an arm lazily and drew her down beside him, feeling her quick, eager response. The thought of Moses touched his mind like wind rippling water. Where was his friend now? he wondered. In what far land was he adventuring?

The wonder did not make him grieve. Sinuhe was not a man to moon vainly over the past. Moses and he had been friends. That had been pleasant. Now, they were divided forever, nor had Sinuhe disgraced himself in the parting. This last, in Sinuhe's opinion, was all that was important to a noble of Egypt; though to his mind the most interesting feature of the whole situation was the way in which from the moment when Moses had interfered with the fate of that Hebrew slave at the brick pits, every act and every event had seemed to fall inevitably into a pattern. That was interesting. It was like a play.

The girl in his arms stirred a trifle impatiently. Sinuhe knew what she expected. As he kissed her expertly and felt her lips yield and open he was wondering what had happened to that Hebrew slave whom he had sent back to Goshen and about whom he had spoken to his uncle, Intef, to make sure that the slave would not be interfered with again. An intelligent man that slave had seemed.

If Sinuhe could have looked up the curving silver of the river on which his pleasure boat floated and seen across the moon-filled land of Goshen, his question would have been answered. Nun stood, as he had stood once before, at the door of his hut. It was one of the contradictions in him that his logic and his atheism could yield to an appreciation of the moonlight transforming the plain and the clumps of palms and the sleeping herds and flocks into a scene of haunted beauty, beauty which woke strange moods in one, which whispered of eternal mystery and eternal sadness, which seemed by its timelessness to mock men confined as they are within the narrow, ever-moving forward lines of Time. He stood there and let the beauty invade him and into its magic was woven, somehow, the sleepy, petulant wail of his infant son, Joshua, and the tender note in his wife's voice as she hushed the child. It was borne in upon him forcibly at this moment that reason was not enough, that there were emotions even within himself, the sceptic, beyond the power of reason to analyse and explain, emotions which, as he put it, betrayed reason.

But there was also in his mind a range of thought towards which he had been struggling ever since he had been returned to Goshen. He, who had always scoffed at the idea of the existence of a god or of anything in the events of life as being other than the formless happenings of chance, or at best, the dream in an idiot's brain, was being compelled to the concept of intelligence in the universe. Had he not recently experienced in his own life a brief instance of that sense of the inevitable, of all the pieces fitting together smoothly as if they were part of some fore-ordained plan? The appearance of Moses at exactly the right moment on that terrible morning of the impalement might, indeed, be attributed to chance. But how could the blind working of chance be used to explain the sequence of events which, step by step, had built up that one incident into the exposure of Moses and his flight? One could, of course, speak of a series of remarkable coincidences. Or, one could say that, once a single event occurred, the rest had followed inevitably, like the turning of a wheel once it is set in motion. The first explanation Nun considered, was to close one's eyes to what had happened. The second was, no matter how one squirmed, to postulate an ordered law of cause and effect and such a law, in itself, seemed to him to postulate intelligence.

It was frightening to Nun to contemplate the possibility of some superintelligence working in and through the universe and to speculate whether this piece of a plan which he had seemed to glimpse in his own life, as if the corner of a veil had been lifted for a brief instant, might not be part of some greater plan. If a man were vouchsafed the length of the ages, he might see that plan working out in its ordered entirety; even though, when viewed within the short span of a single human life, those separate events which made up the pattern of the plan might seem inchoate and without purpose.

It occurred to him, however, that, even if one were compelled to concede the existence of an ordered law of cause and effect, one was not, therefore, forced to admit that such a law required some superintelligence to give it its initial impulse or to keep it in operation. Instead, one could argue that that law was simply the way things had happened and had always happened, without the need of an Intelligence to start the law going or to keep it going.

Mankind, it was true, found it even more difficult to conceive of something without a beginning—the universe, for instance—than something without an ending. Yet surely the difficulty man, because of his finite intelligence and because of the limitations imposed on his thinking by his own limited experiences—

birth and death, for example—found in conceiving of a universe without a beginning did not disprove the possibility that the universe had never had a beginning but had simply always existed. To transfer and apply the fact of puny man's own birth and death to the universe was, in reality, ridiculous; and, similarly, it was absurd to say that, because human laws and human institutions required human intelligence—plus emotion—to start them going and keep them going, the law of the universe must therefore require some super-intelligence plus suprahuman emotion to start it going and keep it going. Once again, an ordered law of cause and effect in the universe might be simply the way things happened and had always happened and would always happen.

But Nun was too honest to fob himself off thus. His method had always been to seize the concrete evidence and to explain and test it by human reason and human logic and experience, however limited those might be. To take refuge in abstractions and far-fetched possibilities seemed to him incorrect if a more human explanation lay at hand. Granted that, once a chain of causation was initiated, it worked itself out to its last link, from whence did the initial impulse come, or how were these laws of cause and effect established and kept in operation? One could say, as he had already suggested to himself, that it was a limitation of the human intelligence to demand either the initial impulse or continual supervision. But Nun felt that if one used the tools one had, however limited these might be, one must postulate a cause—beginning for all things. Nun was willing to forget abstruse speculation and accept this as a fact.

This did not lead him to admit the existence of the Egyptian gods, or for that matter, the existence of any personal gods at all, including Yahweh. These still remained to him the figments of man's imagination, the refuge of the paucity of his intelligence, the demons of fear and ignorance and the illusions of hopes and desires which humanity conjured up for itself. It would have been heresy to Amram. But to Nun, Yahweh was only another man's attempt to personalize the Power he glimpsed, or thought he glimpsed, working through the universe and to degrade it to humanity's level. How could one admit of the sporadic, capricious intervention of that great Power in the affairs of some specially favoured people? Seen thus, what was Yahweh or Amon or Baal but another Pharaoh?

Nun, however, was willing to admit now that the course of human events suggested the operation of a suprahuman Intelligence not to be comprehended by man. Whether that Intelligence were malevolent or benevolent was still another

question. It was possible, Nun reflected, thinking of the cruelties and absurdities so evident in human life, that the Intelligence was not especially concerned with humanity at all, that in its plan, humanity was no more important and no more permanent, if as permanent, than the grass and the trees. Even so, it was, at least, conceivable that in the working out of the plan, whether that plan was, in terms of humanity's interest in it, good or evil, the Hebrews as well as the Egyptians had their part. It might even be conceivable that certain individuals, such as the Pharaoh or Moses, stood out in the plan. If so, he, Nun, the physician, was a piece which had been moved in the interplay between those two. Was it conceivable that he might again be used?

Moses! As the picture of that young prince recurred to him, Nun forgot his theorizing. He stirred. His eyes came alive again to take in the scene before him. Like Sinuhe he wondered where Moses was. But his wonder was more intense and more personal. The news that Moses, the Prince of Egypt, was a Hebrew, and that he had, after the discovery of his masquerade, escaped from Egypt, had spread among the Hebrews in Goshen like a fire driven by the wind through stubble. The vague legend about him had, for a moment, taken on the form of reality and, at the same time, had grown in stature. Already, in the hopeful hopelessness of slaves, it was being rumoured that at some day he would return, that at some time he would smite the Pharaoh and the Egyptians and lead the Hebrews out of bondage. It was a hope, an excitement in the land. If Moses ever did return he would be received by his fellow-Hebrews not as an ordinary man but as a symbol at which one looks in terms of one's own expectations, almost as a demigod. And, if he did return, Nun resolved deeply, he himself would be ready; yes, himself and his son, his Joshua.

While Nun had been lost in his reflections, down in Tanis in the back room of the shop to which they had fled from Avaris, Jochebed was puttering about in the dim light, setting the place to rights, with occasional glances at the sleeping face of Amram. He had grown consistently weaker since that night in Avaris, a fortnight ago. At times, Jochebed had to go over to him and bend down in order to hear his shallow breathing and know that he was yet alive. She knew that he was happy. Ever since his son had appeared to him out of the darkness, shining in the magnificence of a Prince of Egypt, Amram, whose faculties had not been strong enough to realize either Moses' danger or his flight, had been more than ever lost in his illusions and his

prophecies. It was better so. It was better than he should believe that Yahweh had heard his prayers and that Moses, now full-grown, was to be the Deliverer of whom he had dreamed than for him to know that this son of his wandered somewhere in the darkness outside of Egypt, a homeless fugitive.

Yet Jochebed's anxiety about her son could not prevent a certain glow in her heart, Miriam and Aaron were good children, although Miriam's caustic bitterness was not pleasant. Aaron, in particular, was a satisfactory son. In him was that practicality which was understandable to Jochebed, and, in the light of her life since those days at Memphis, she was able to comprehend the necessity he felt to do what he could to help his fellows in bondage.

But Aaron and Miriam had been with her all her life. Much as she appreciated them, she could not feel for them the anguished affection, the peculiar love she knew for Moses. To this future and to the hopes of safety and splendour for him she had sacrificed the possession of him and, in so doing, had made him, though absent, the very centre and meaning of her life. Now, those dreams were shattered. Now, Moses was again out of her life, in danger, an exiled wanderer. Yet, in the intervening space he had come back to her. He knew her now for his mother. She could feel that, at last, in a way, she possessed him as her son. More than that, she could be proud of him. Had he been content to hold his tongue and let his fellow Hebrews suffer he could, still be at this moment a Prince of Egypt; and to Jochebed it was at last clear that, at times, defeat is better than victory, if that defeat has been purchased by nobleness. He had proved that he was more than a prince. He was a man.

These were the warming thoughts in her mind as she paused, startled by a sound from the couch. She looked. Amram had suddenly sat up. His eyes were open. She hurried over. Amram raised his arms. She checked herself, frightened. He was staring upward.

"I see, O Yahweh," he cried in a strong voice. "Yea, I behold. I see my son, Moses, leading Thy people out of bondage. The hosts of the Pharaoh are overthrown. Thou, Thyself, leadest Thy people and they shall become a mighty nation. Yea, O Yahweh, I behold. I thank Thee, Yahweh."

"Amram!" Jochebed whispered.

Amram did not hear her. He stared up for a long moment. Then, with a sigh, he fell back lifeless on the pillow.

Faraway in the tent of Jethro, the Kenite, Moses closed his eyes, wearily, hopelessly.

CHAPTER III

FROM the tent of Jethro, set under an isolated group of palms, Moses could see the women, bright in vivid reds and greens and blues, busy among the trees of the oasis at their weaving and their making of butter and cheese. To their right was the tent, set apart, in which reposed the rude ark of acacia wood which was the only visible symbol of the god whom the Kenites worshipped. Along the valley and in the wadis opening off it, where the scanty streams of spring nourished a short-lived herbage, were dotted the flocks of goats and sheep which were almost the sole wealth of the tribe. On the cliffs across the valley the desert sun was already playing tricks of colour, a promise of the heat which would soon replace the coolness of the night.

Moses was content to sit. He had recovered much of his strength in the three weeks since memory had returned to him. It had even been possible for him to accompany the tribe when, a few days before this, they had moved from the oasis on which he had stumbled as a thirst-maddened and lost wanderer to this one where they now abode for a season; though had it not been for Zipporah and the donkey which she had insisted that he ride he would never have completed the journey.

To restore the physical, however, is not to heal the mental and the spiritual. The Moses who sat here was sunk in an apathy which was only relieved by an occasional flash of interest. He moved about the camp like a simulacrum of a man. His eyes took in the youngsters who shouted at him and the women who eyed him boldly or timidly, and the suspicious glances of the men when, at evening, they drove in the flocks for the watering. His mind noted automatically that these Kenites were barbarians such as he had met on his campaigns, nomads who held their property in common so that personal possessions were limited to such things as spears and knives or mugs and kneading-troughs. It aroused a faint interest in him to observe something which, as a general for the Pharaoh crushing tribes such as these for the glory of Egypt, had never been evident to him: namely that, barbarians though these tribesmen were, there was a fixed order and ritual for the doing and arrangement of everything, even for the milking of the goats and for the order of the watering, from which no deviation was allowed.

It puzzled Moses slightly, indeed, to remark the complexity of a life which in his previous existence he had regarded as primitive and impulsive; since he did not yet understand that

age-old custom was as binding on these tribesmen as the ritual laid down with anathema and a claim to revelation by the priests of Egypt. When he watched Jethro, who was both priest and chieftain, sit in judgment over a dispute about the order of pasturage or rights to water, he marvelled that the decisions were accepted unquestioningly, not comprehending that Jethro must rule according to the immemorial custom of the forefathers and that, when he had done so, there was no more to be said. It surprised him mildly, also, that there appeared to be little of the promiscuity in sexual relations which Moses had seen among the tribes of Canaan or as was common in Egypt among the peasants at Mendes or Bubastis or elsewhere in time of festival. On the contrary, these barbarians seemed to have a far sterner code than Egypt and one which was rigidly enforced. Each man had more than one wife, of course, as soon as he could support more than one, as was the custom in Egypt and everywhere in the world, so far as Moses knew. But adultery, a venial sin in Egypt, was punishable with death.

Yet he observed all this without the vividness, the eager questioning and attempts to get at the reasons behind the phenomena which had been characteristic of Aahmose, Prince of Egypt. It was with detachment that he listened to Jethro speak with the certainty of faith about the Holy Mount and the god who dwelt there, the god whose symbol was the ark of acacia wood which only Jethro might approach. He was, Moses had gathered, a god of the wilderness, a god whose power extended, so the Kenites believed, over all the peninsula of Sinai, and who watched over them with a kind of barbarian fierceness, demanding their adoration and their obedience and the sacrifice of a kid or a lamb before his ark on his holy days.

Such a belief seemed quite natural to Moses, although Jethro's devotion impressed him, accustomed as he was to the numerous gods of Egypt, as excessive. If Jethro could have had his way, the tribesmen would have destroyed their amulets and their personal fetishes and the women their own peculiar gods which were kept in the tents and to which they made their offerings of milk and cheese. Here, however, age-old custom was stronger than Jethro. All he could do was to insist that, above and beyond these minor gods, the tribe's allegiance was due to the god of the Holy Mount, the fear-compelling god of Sinai; and, without realizing it, Moses had already absorbed a certain respect and curiosity towards this unknown deity.

But neither this nor anything else was enough to rouse him fully from his apathy. He did not care about the scarcely concealed hostility of the tribesmen, and, in particular, about the

jealousy of Barak, that tall young man whom he had first seen at the wells. He evaded Jethro's questionings. When Zipporah came to speak to him he answered her politely but, so it seemed to her, without the slightest realization that she was a woman. On this morning, as on the other mornings, he was content to rest in the sun like an old man, or rather like one who is but the shell of a man, seeing that there is no vital spark in him. There had been pulsing, glowing life in him in Egypt. Now, though his body was living, his soul seemed dead. Tharbis? He tried not to think of her. Yet, in spite of himself, she was constantly in his mind. He would curse her, her cheapness, her falsity. He would curse himself for his foolishness in having been taken in by her, in having believed in her. He would tell himself that she was so ordinary and common that she was not worthy of a single thought. And then he would see her turning on her heel, would imagine her in Merneptah's bed. Ah, if he could only punish her; or at least, scorn her as she had scorned him and make her feel it. But he could not. As he sat here it was Tharbis who shattered him, who destroyed him, who made him a faint shadow of a man.

Zipporah, however, busy with her sisters at the weaving on the edge of the oasis below him, was intensely conscious of Moses. Her fingers tangled the wool as she drew it through the pierced hole in the deer's horn to form the thread. They snarled the thread as they passed it in and out from side to side of the rough frame. Her sisters teased her. She blushed furiously and tried to apply herself and forget Moses. But he was not forgotten so easily. Even though her back was turned to him she could see him sitting at the door of the tent. Nor did she any longer try to hide it from herself. She was in love and she knew that she was in love. She also knew that love was the most tormenting, the most hopeless anguish in the world. To see the utter lack of interest in his eyes! To realize that while, as she thought, every glance, every movement of hers, betrayed to him and all the world her passion for him, his eyes did not dignify her even to the extent of noticing.

And what had she to offer to one who had lived in the court of Egypt and had mingled with the delicate, the beautiful women of Egypt? What indeed? A tangle of coppery hair and a tanned and freckled face and rough hands and shapeless gowns and a life which knew nothing of refinements, but only of the things of the desert. She wished her sisters would stop teasing her. Every word was like a knife thrust in her heart. And she could not answer. Worse, she had no knowledge of love returned within her to make her brave, to armour her against them. Her fingers

trembled as she drew out the thread. She saw her hands. Why were they not lily-white? If only, she dreamed, she could become like the ladies of Egypt. If only she had fine-spun gowns of linen to wear and perfumes with which to sweeten her body and bracelets of gold on her arms——

"There, you've snarled it again," Anna complained. She bent forward, her vivid, gamine face impatient as she began to undo the tangle. "Why don't you go up and talk to your Moses? You're no good here."

"Moses doesn't want her, that's the trouble," observed Deborah. Deborah was ten, but little escaped the brightness of her eyes. "Barak does. Did you see him looking daggers' points at Moses this morning, Zipporah?"

"It would be much more sensible if she did wed with Barak and stop this nonsense," observed Maachah, who was the quietest of the sisters. "Barak is the strongest of the young men in the tribe. All the women are eager after Barak."

"I don't see what you want of that mooning lump anyway," put in Anna, who had by now got the knot untangled. "Why don't you forget him, Zipporah? A man who doesn't know you're alive."

It was too true, too horribly true. With a sudden gasp Zipporah got to her feet and, not saying a word, turned and ran in among the trees.

"Why, what's the matter?" Anna asked.

Maachah shrugged her shoulders. "She has got it bad," she observed briefly.

The sisters went back to their weaving unconcerned. They were all of them, except perhaps Maachah, little savages whom life had made frank and brutally direct except for that feline unpredictability towards men with which nature seems to endow all that is feminine. Zipporah walked quickly away from them, looking for a place to weep and paying no attention to the curious glances of the other women whom she passed. It is doubtful indeed if she really saw them. In a clump of trees, in that part of the oasis which was furthest from Moses, she flung herself down.

It was here that, some time later, Jethro, who had been in the tent of the ark in communion with his god, chanced upon her. She started up at his approach and then, seeing who it was, sank back, crouched. It took Jethro an instant to wrench his mind from his thoughts of the God of Sinai and take her in. He stared down at her, puzzled, noting her tear-streaked face and the spasmodic sobs which still shook her body.

"What is it, daughter?" he asked gently.

"N—nothing."

"But it must be something. Can't you tell me?"

She shook her head. Jethro rubbed his nose in perplexity. One can be a desert chieftain and a devoted priest of the God of Sinai and also be a father and a kindly one. So long as these daughters of his had been children, Jethro was reflecting, it had been a simple matter to discover their childish hurts and troubles and banish them. But when they grew up—he sighed, wishing that Zipporah's mother were alive and realizing that when a daughter becomes a woman she develops a secret world of her own into which a father cannot enter. Was Barak the trouble, he wondered. He had noticed Barak rutting around. It might be a wise thing to wed her to Barak. Barak was the most turbulent as well as the strongest young man of the tribe, and as a chieftain, Jethro knew the danger such a young man could create if he gathered a faction around him. A chieftain, if he is to remain chieftain, must consider such things. He said:

"Is it Barak?"

Zipporah shook her head, even more violently.

"Well," Jethro said slowly, "I won't ask you further, daughter. But you know, don't you, that there's nothing, no, nothing, in which I wouldn't help you?"

"Oh, Father!" Zipporah sobbed. In a little rush she was up from the ground and in his arms. She melted there. Jethro remembered the time when she was nine and the pet kid she had loved had been torn to pieces by the jackals. There had been the same storm of weeping.

He let her have her cry out. But above the head resting on his breast his mind was busy. Jethro was not an ordinary man. In his youth he had travelled widely, across the country of the Midianities, up through Moab and Edom, amongst the tribes of Canaan, even over to Babylon. In addition, there was woven into him that deep wisdom which comes to a reflective man who has lived in wide and silent places close to the elementals of life through the long nights and the longer days and on whose shoulders has rested the burden of caring for a tribe whose reactions were, essentially, the reactions of children. Mystic communion with the God of Sinai had become a habit with him so that his God was not as gods are to so many people, a vague person to be appealed to only in times of fear and pain, but an ever-present living reality by whose will Jethro guided all his life. But mystic communion had not destroyed his practicality. He could put two and two together. There was the coming of this stranger and the expression in Zipporah's eyes when she looked at him, and now this unreasonable out-

burst. Women, at the best, were curious things. No one could tell which way their emotions would jump or why they did this or that. Yes, that was the answer. Jethro's eyes hardened a little.

The sun was climbing to his noontide apex when Jethro came up the slope to his tent. Moses had shifted into the shade. The chieftain took his place beside him. His eyes were shrewd as he looked the stranger over. He was handsome—that was indisputable—and the cloak of his apathy wrapped him with a melancholy and a hint of being lost and out of place which, on considering it, Jethro could see would be irresistible to a girl such as Zipporah. He himself was attracted to this young man whose life he had saved as if that act had made the stranger belong peculiarly to him. One was kind instinctively to the lost and the helpless. Now, however, there was a trace of sternness in Jethro's weatherbeaten face. He said:

"Your health is with you once again, Egyptian."

Moses nodded.

"That is well," Jethro went on. "Within a week we move to another pasturage."

There was no trace of interest in Moses' face.

"We shall pass within easy distance of the fort and the turquoise mines of the Egyptians," remarked Jethro, watching the stranger closely.

Moses' face came alive abruptly. He sat up.

"What was that?" he demanded.

"I said we would pass close to the fort of the Egyptians," repeated Jethro. "I will send some of my young men to escort you thither."

Moses jumped to his feet. "No," he exclaimed violently. "No."

"Your clothes mark you out to be an Egyptian," Jethro pointed out reasonably. "You yourself have never denied that you were an Egyptian. At the forts of the Egyptians you will find your fellow-countrymen. They will send you back to Egypt."

There was no longer anything apathetic about Moses. He stared about him wildly. He looked down at Jethro's shrewd, considering face.

"I cannot—I will not go back to Egypt," he cried.

Jethro waited. There was no help for it.

"I was thrust out of Egypt," Moses explained unwillingly.

Jethro's face was stern. "For what crime which cried out for punishment?" he asked with an inexorable note in his voice.

"My crime," Moses said bitterly, "was to be a Hebrew, a dog of a Hebrew."

He watched, expecting to see a scorn, a shrinking from him in Jethro's face. But there was none. Jethro looked meditative. That was all. He asked: "Why was that a crime?"

Quite suddenly Moses felt that he could tell everything to this barbaric chieftain with the quiet eyes. He dropped down beside him. In bitter, impassioned words, his eyes flashing, his whole demeanour transformed, he poured it out—his boyhood in the palace of the Princess Bint-Anath, his young manhood, believing himself to be a Prince of Egypt, the scorn and pity with which he had looked upon the Hebrew slaves, the terrible discovery that he, too, was a Hebrew, the way the court had turned against him, the agony of his flight. Only about Tharbis he did not tell. About her he could not tell. Jethro listened, his lean fingers caressing his beard. His eyes lost their sternness. His face became kindly.

"And so," Moses concluded, "I came into the wilderness. In this way I came upon your tents, Jethro. Better if you had let me die. Better to slay me now."

Jethro looked at the vivid, disconsolate face. "Why?" he asked gently.

"Because I am a man without a country, without a people. I am of no use to myself or others. My life is finished."

"No man's life is finished until God wills it," Jethro told him sternly. "Nor is it like a man to bewail his lot. In the wilderness a man endures whatsoever God sends upon him. And who knows the purpose or the will of the God of Sinai, He who hath power over the wilderness? Bear yourself like a man, you who have been driven forth from Egypt."

"Yet why should they have driven me forth? I am a Hebrew. That is true. Hebrews, too, are men. What is this difference so that when a man is an Egyptian all bow before him and when he is a Hebrew he becomes a thing despised?"

"Men are married to words," Jethro remarked absentmindedly. He thought a moment or two. "In a way," he went on, "we are kinsfolk, you and I."

"Kinsfolk!"

"The Kenites are of the seed of Midian. And Midian was sprung from the loins of Abraham."

"From the loins of Abraham?"

"By Keturah, his wife, the wife he married after Sarai," Jethro explained abstractedly. To a man who saw the will of God in everything, as Jethro did, there was beginning to be, as he considered it, something more than chance in Moses' presence in his tent. "The Hebrews are descended through Sarai," he went on still more thoughtfully. "There are still

Hebrews in Canaan. I have seen them. Israel, they call themselves. For when Joseph went up to Egypt not all the Hebrews went with him; and there were others who fled back to Canaan when Egypt spewed out the Hyksos. Yes, we are kinsfolk, you and I. It may be that my God, the God of Sinai, has a purpose in this. You should offer prayer to the God of Sinai, Moses."

Gods! Moses thought bitterly. What had gods done for him? Sinuhe had once said there were no gods. Might not Sinuhe be right?

"This God of Sinai," he said aloud, with the touch of a sneer. "I have heard of him from you. I have seen his ark. But what do I know of him, Jethro? I have never even heard his name."

"His name is not to be lightly spoken."

"How can I worship him if I do not know his name?"

Jethro looked towards the tent of the ark. He got up and faced towards it and bowed three times, spreading out his hands and inclining his head.

"His name," he said, "His holy name is Yahweh."

After one hushed instant of silence, Moses sprang to his feet. "Yahweh!"

"Yes, Yahweh."

"Not Yahweh—surely!"

"Yes."

Moses glanced around him wildly, as if he expected to see Amram before him. It was as if a hand had reached out from Egypt to touch him. In his mind were his prayers at Jochebed's knees and Amram laying his hand upon his head and saying: "The peace of Yahweh be on you." It could not be that this God also dwelt in the wilderness, that here in this barren waste he had come upon Him once more! If it were so it was a miracle. Yahweh! Was it, could it be possible that Yahweh, the slave-god of the Hebrews, had brought all this to pass? If so, there might still be some meaning in life, some purpose. But he must be sure.

"Yahweh, you said?" he repeated.

"Yes. From time immemorial hath He been our God. He dwelleth in the storm cloud and in the lightning. He walketh on the peak of Sinai. He is not, like the lesser gods, imaged by man's hands. For none can look upon His face and live."

"But he is my father's God," Moses exclaimed. "Amram's God!"

"Your father's God?" Jethro rose to his feet and his eyebrows were frowning.

"Yes. The Hebrews, they say, worship Joseph-el and Jacob-el and Baal and the Bull of Memphis and the Goat of Mendes.

But my father worships Yahweh. When I was a child, before I knew I was his son, he spoke to me of Yahweh. When I was an infant, Jochebed, whom I thought to be my nurse, taught me prayers to Yahweh at her knee."

Jethro sat down slowly, his eyes never leaving Moses' face. It came back into his mind that, according to the legends, Yahweh, God of the Kenites, was said also to have been the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob. Yet it was also clear to him that Yahweh had always dwelt on Sinai. How then could He have been in Canaan? Could Yahweh, then, dwell in different places at the same time, or at different times? Or was it that, dwelling on Sinai, His power could reach out, even beyond Sinai, even as far as Egypt?

These were new ideas to Jethro and he could not take them in at once. His belief was that Yahweh dwelt on Sinai and that His power was limited to His own land, the peninsula of Sinai. Even in the peninsula of Sinai, there were, to Jethro, other gods than Yahweh, the gods of the Amalekites and the Midianites, for instance, and, at times, when the power of Yahweh was weakened or when His people had sinned, it was granted to the Amalekites and the Midianites to prevail over the Kenites. But if Yahweh could reach out His hand even to Egypt—surely then there must have been some great, some mighty purpose in His mind. What that purpose was, Jethro could not imagine. But, to a man of his deep faith, Moses abruptly became more than a homeless wanderer, a fugitive whom, out of the kindness of his heart, he had healed and sheltered. He towered in Jethro's eyes as a man marked out by Yahweh for some special destiny. He said:

"It is a miracle."

Moses was by now becoming convinced of the same thought. He was not a sceptic like Nun. Nor had he ever really shared in Sinuhe's careless agnosticism. The gods of Egypt had been real to him, were still real to him, although, except for Amon-Ra and Ptah, he had been inclined simply to accept them as part of one's normal life to whom one paid due sacrifice and then forgot them. What he had worshipped had been Egypt and the Pharaoh as a symbol of Egypt. Later Tharbis had come into his life and Tharbis, too, had fitted into his worship for Egypt. When he was no longer able to worship Egypt or the Pharaoh or Tharbis, he had been lost, helpless, since a man like Moses, as Ipuwer, indeed, had perceived at On, must always worship and reverence something outside himself.

Such men will grasp at a straw if that straw will help them to faith in something by which they may give importance and

meaning to their own lives and actions and not continue to feel feeble and helpless and futile. So now Moses, forgetting Tharbis for the moment, was thinking of Yahweh, not as the God of Amram or as the slave-god of the slave Hebrews, but as a God who might become his God, a God who for some reason, some purpose of His own, had turned His eyes upon him. In the light of this possibility even his sufferings and his exile might be a part of the plan of God and so have significance and meaning, instead of being, as he had thought, capricious, inexplicable happenings. How else, he asked himself now, could he, out of all the tribes in the desert, have been brought to the one tribe which worshipped Yahweh, to the one man who knew the Hebrews and their history, and who, like Amram, worshipped Yahweh with all his heart and soul? Yes, surely, he told himself, this presaged some plan, some purpose which Yahweh had in mind for him, even for Moses, the outcast from Egypt.

But what was that plan, that purpose? If he could only come to know it!

He sat down, his eyes no longer dull and apathetic. To find Yahweh, his father's God, here in the wilderness! Did Yahweh, at some future time, plan to take him back to Egypt?

Jethro was thinking, too, rapidly. Barak would be a danger. Nor did the tribesmen look with favour on Moses. They were banded against him in their minds with the distrustful, the surly suspicion of dwellers in the desert towards an alien from that civilized world which lay outside their experience. That would double the danger. It would be safer, indeed, to follow his first purpose and send Moses away from the tribe—and from Zipporah.

Yet who was he, Jethro, priest of the Kenites, to set up his safety and his comfort against the will of the God of Sinai? To him, steeped as he was in devotion, Yahweh had already sufficiently declared Himself. He turned to Moses.

"Yahweh hath willed it," he said, with conviction. "Nothing is done without the will of Yahweh. Thou shalt dwell with me and become my son-in-law."

Moses glanced up, his reverie interrupted, his eyes startled.

"My daughter, Zipporah," explained Jethro. "She looks with favour upon you."

All his memories flooded back on Moses. Women! He wanted no woman. He could not, he would not wed with anyone. Nor could he tell Jethro, not even now, about Tharbis. He said, searching desperately for an excuse which would not wound this old man who had been kind to him:

"I am not worthy."

"Yahweh is judge of that. And Yahweh hath given us a sign."

"I must be sure," Moses pleaded desperately. "Give me time to think. Let me ponder." He had a sudden idea. "Let me be your herdsman, Jethro."

Jethro looked at him, searchingly. His fingers felt for his chin as he remembered that this young man, a Prince of Egypt, must already have had women in his life. Who knew what pictures were before his mind? Well, let him have time. Yahweh was a relentless hunter of men.

"Herdsman?" he said scoffingly. "What do you, a Prince of Egypt, know of sheep and goats?"

"I can learn, Jethro. Let me be your herdsman."

"So be it."

CHAPTER IV

THE long weeks had passed. Moses wore a goatskin over one shoulder. He carried a staff, the staff of the shepherd. His face, which had been smooth-shaven in Egypt, was covered by a thick-curved beard. His body was tanned and unwashed. His feet were toughened. There was a new assurance in his bearing. The tribesmen might still view him with that suspicion with which one regards those whom one feels to be different from oneself. But there was also respect in their bearing ever since a lion had leaped out of a wadi on the flocks, and Moses, awaiting it, had dropped it with his arrows.

This was part of the change in him. There were others. For the days under the sun are long. So are the nights when one lies out under the stars. One has time for thought, not the hurried thoughts of Egypt, hemmed in by cities and palaces, confused by the constant pressure of people and made metallic by the necessity for quick decisions, but the long, slow-moving thoughts which permeate one's whole being. Standing under a thorn tree, leaning on his staff and watching his flock browse the scant herbage amongst the rocks, or driving his bleating charges to the wells, Moses was sometimes overwhelmed by the incongruity of things, that he, who had ruled over armies, should be standing here, his whole responsibility a flock of goats. Yet to him and the tribe those goats were as important as an army. Let the pasturage fail or the water dry up or a hostile tribe swoop out from amongst the rocks so that the goats died or were driven away and the tribe would face starvation and extinction.

It all depended on circumstances as to what was important,

Moses had discovered. Here, life was stripped to elementals, to hunger and thirst and weariness and the need for pasturage and water, and as he had begun to admit to himself secretly, a woman to sleep with. How ridiculous such simple wants and necessities would have seemed to the courtiers of the Pharaoh! And yet how ridiculous now, in comparison to them, seemed the scandal of the court, the luxury wherewith one was surrounded, the struggle for this command or that, the constant intrigues for the favour of the Pharaoh. It began to occur to Moses, indeed, that the life of the desert was cleansing and purifying.

It may have been that he thought this because of his own experience in coming to the wilderness sick in heart and body and finding healing in its simplicity. But he could not prevent the conviction growing within him that one was better for not requiring the degenerate trappings of civilization, its impotent needs, its constant search for the novel and the luxurious, its preoccupation with the externals of life. Here, a man was but one step removed from the animals. But his mind was free of a thousand trivial urgencies, a hundred distracting and unnecessary worries and seeming necessities. A man could ponder life and its meaning. He could, with less bitterness, analyse why when he had been a Prince of Egypt people had made way for him, and yet, as soon as he had become known as a Hebrew, the same people had turned on him to rend him. He could also consider the gods and their relationship to men and why the peasants of Egypt paid homage to their beast-gods and the priests made their offerings to ithyphallic Min and encouraged the obscenity of his worship, and yet those same priests, or others like them, could sing the hymn to Osiris, Lord of the Dead, who promised immortality to all those who dealt justly and lived honourably in this world of Ra. The words of Ipuwer would come back to him:

"All gods are at best but manifestations of the one God, my son. Or, it may be, they are parts of God which men have taken and made in terms of their own imagining. But the one God, Moses, is uncreate and withdrawn, not imaged by man's hands nor conceived of by his mind, existing apart in a form which no man will ever know. He is not made by man but *is*."

But Ipuwer's god was too impersonal for Moses. His mind was not like that of Ipuwer. He did not want God to be faraway and withdrawn, a disembodied force. He was not quite capable of conceiving of God in terms like those. A god to him must be a person, one whom one could think of as watching over one, as possessing some of the attributes of humanity but in a majesty

and a power which no human could ever possess. So, more and more his thoughts turned to Yahweh; Yahweh, who had seemed to have given to him a sign; Yahweh, who, if he could believe what Jethro said to him in the evenings near the wells, had willed that he be driven out of Egypt into the desert because in the desert there was some work which Yahweh had decided that he should do. The gods of Egypt? They were far away, and here in the desert Egypt itself had begun to seem to him an alien, a distant place, so divorced from his present life that it was as if it had never been.

Moses did not understand altogether that this was nature's way of healing a wound which had almost destroyed him. Nor did he comprehend that, in the frailty of humanity, the despair and the memory of anguish and hatred and even of love cannot survive in vividness. One's soul must have reality. It cannot feed for long on the shadows of the past or relive its memories if there is no hope that those memories can once more be converted into actuality. Though he would scarcely have admitted it, it was with an effort on most occasions that he recalled Egypt and the Pharaoh and Bint-Anath and Sinuhe, his friend, and even Merneptah. Nor did they have reality. It was difficult, and, at times, frightening and wonderful to recall that these feet of his which now walked over the burning sand or the flinty shale had once trodden the gold mosaic of the Pharaoh's court or tip-toed in reverence up the great Hall of Amon in Karnak. Yes, even Tharbis, he would tell himself, blocking off the pain of her deliberately, no longer had reality. Even she was like a picture in a shadow show, a silhouette without depth or meaning. In these days only Jochebed and Amram had meaning. For they had worshipped Yahweh. And in Yahweh was Moses' hope, Yahweh who, surely, had brought him forth from Egypt for some mighty deed.

So he would tell himself. For the most part it was true. But there were treacherous moments, those moments when in the darkness of night one awakens suddenly and for a few moments the dead past is no longer dead but a living present, anguished and terrible, because one sees it and feels it as more nakedly present than the present but cannot do more than stretch out one's hands in vain, shattering regret towards its vividness. In these moments he wept. In these moments he cried out, "Tharbis," stretching out his hands to her and then, picturing her in the bed of Merneptah, he would groan. His hatred for Merneptah would be a devastating thing and he would feel that he would die if he could not get his hands upon that abhorred throat and tear it as a lion tears at the throat of a sheep, knowing at

the same time that Tharbis, shallow as a pool of muddy water into which everyone steps, would already have forgotten him. In these moments he lay defenceless before the stabs of memory, and the knife twisted in his heart. In these moments he prayed to Yahweh in helpless despair to save him, to give him some great work to do in which, losing himself, he would also lose his memories.

This was the Moses who, at high afternoon, stood on the slope of the wadi and watched his sleeping flock and stared down at the valley. The palms of the oasis were diminutive and unimportant in the sunlight. On either side of them and up the slopes and in the gorges opening into the wadi, wherever there was a speck of green, were scattered clumps of dots, the flocks of the tribesmen. It occurred to Moses that there was a curiously timeless quality about the scene. This oasis was a different oasis from the one to which he had first come and that other in which he had begged Jethro to let him be his herdsman. Yet it might have been the same. There were the same palms, the same scanty flush of green fading out into the barrenness, the same enclosing hills—and these goats and sheep, these tribesmen watching them, might have been there since eternity without change, without alteration. The generations were born and died, sheep and goats and men came and went, but the scene remained eternally the same.

He speculated on this sense of timelessness. He wondered whether the sunlight had aught to do with it, making all things seem to stand still. He reflected that this same sense of never-changing time had been with him in youth when each day seemed an eternity and each night never-ending. One could not remember when the tyranny of Time had begun to invade one. But Time, he decided, was a monster born of civilization which had soon come to dominate it. In Egypt, there was always so much to be done. There was hurry. A man was conscious of the passing minutes. He remembered this appointment or that and the days were never long enough but seemed to jostle each other in their haste to reach the pit of oblivion. Here one had all time. Why hurry? the wilderness seemed to whisper. Why be impatient? Here tomorrow is like today and yesterday is like tomorrow and the hours are long.

Moses sighed and glanced once more over the valley. He told himself that he was content, not realizing that the very fact that he told himself this, was the surest sign of healing and that, his apathy gone, he was becoming ready for something more. It crossed his mind that the pasturage was being cropped close and that soon it would be time to move on, closer to Mount Sinai. Mount Sinai! But that was Jethro's responsibility, not his. He

had no responsibility, no decisions to make, except,—a frown furrowed his forehead—except for Zipporah.

He shifted his feet a little, uneasily. Even in the desert one could not evade decisions, not altogether. Even in the desert there were women and the troubles and the problems they created. Jethro had said nothing. But it had not escaped Moses that there was an unanswered question in his eyes. Nor could it escape him, that whenever he drove his flock to the wells, Zipporah, as if by accident, was always there to look at him even if they did not exchange a word; or that the whole tribe, men and women both, and even the children, were watching him and Barak, waiting to see what would happen. And Barak hated him. Why should he not? Were he in Barak's place, he would have felt the same. Here was a young man, primitive and vigorous in his reactions, infinitely more suited to the wilderness life than himself, who had been the girl's accepted suitor until Moses came.

Moses leaned his weight on his staff and stared across the valley. If only he could go to Barak frankly and openly. If only he could tell him that he was not a rival for Zipporah's hand, no matter how attractive she was—and Moses did not, at this time, realize that his recognition of the attractiveness of Zipporah was a sign both of the walling over of his wound and of his changing standards. In Egypt, if he had seen Zipporah, he would have dismissed her casually as a desert woman and thought no more of her. Here in the desert, however, she was in everyone's opinion the most desirable of the women, and Moses, without being conscious of it, had begun to estimate her with a tribesman's eyes.

Yes, she was attractive—the broad brow, the burnished hair, the softly curved shape. Yet, even so, the thought of marrying her repelled him. Women! Women, he told himself viciously, were clever at fooling you. That was their chief purpose in life—to deceive men about themselves—until they had no more use for you. And then, like Tharbis, they showed themselves as they really were. To take them—yes, and sneer as you took them. To marry them—no. If he could only explain his attitude to Barak and make it clear to him that he had no desire to wed with Zipporah.

Yet this, he recognized reluctantly, was not the way of the wilderness. In the wilderness, men were silent. Speech was not easy for them. They were suspicious, unfriendly. More was said by a look, a gesture, an attitude, than by words. No, he could not approach Barak. It was a pity. But, even in the desert, there was the curse of human relationships. He glanced across to his right. A half mile away in the shadow of a rock he could make out the dot which was Barak. What would Barak finally do?

If Moses could have seen into Barak's mind, he would have perceived the tribesman coming gradually to a decision. Minds work slowly in the desert. For the past ten days Barak had been mulling over a suggestion at which Elihun had hinted. Elihun, like Moses, was a fugitive, a Canaanite, who some three years before this had joined the tribe and of whose shrewdness and cunning Barak had an instinctive distrust. Yet, in that matter, what Elihun had suggested appeared to have sense in it. Did not Barak in all practical matters rule the tribe? Elihun had mentioned casually. Was not Jethro, these days, always in the Holy Tent? And who was more fitted to be chieftain than he who did the chieftain's work?

In the way of the desert Barak had said nothing. But the idea had taken root. Without an overt word being said Barak knew that the younger tribesmen would follow him. The older men might resist. But it was not this possibility which gave Barak pause and made him turn the problem over in his mind again and again, looking at it from every side. To slay Jethro and take the chieftainship and seize Zipporah for himself would be a simple physical act. Barak had no fear of the physical. But this fierce tribesman with the matt-black eyes and the face like that of an untamed hawk, a man who could and had faced single-handed the charge of the lion and had laughed in fierce exultation as the Amalekites swept down, was afraid of the invisible. To slay Jethro would be to break the immemorial custom of the tribe. Who knew what awful powers might thereby be unloosed? Might not the demons which—so Barak believed as implicitly as he believed in the solidity of the spear he held in his hand—lurked in the darkness, waiting to snatch the unwary and those whose sins left them unprotected, reach out their clutching claws and carry him off to who knew what unknown horrors?

His fingers sought the protection of the amulet at his throat as if the mere thought of killing Jethro might have made him accessible. Above all, he remembered, Jethro was the priest of That whose abode was on the Holy Mount but which sent part of its Power, as Barak believed absolutely, to dwell in the Ark of the Holy Tent. Barak, like his fellow-tribesmen, was convinced that That within the Ark would slay him if he so much as touched It with unhallowed hands. How much more terrible would be Its vengeance if he were to slay Jethro, the Priest of the Ark? And how can a man fight with demons and spirits? To this fierce tribesman, who feared nothing physical, the mere thought of calling down the spirits upon himself was enough to bring out a cold sweat on his forehead.

He wiped it off. His eyes slid round to his left. With his keen

vision, to make out Moses under his thorn tree was simple. Such direct, uncomplicated rage filled his whole being that it was strange that none of it was communicated to Moses. It had been galling to a man of Barak's temperament even to admit that he had a rival, and it was still utterly incomprehensible to him that Zipporah should see anything in this moonsick stranger. Was this foreigner as strong as he? Was he as skilled in the ways of the desert? True, he had faced a lion and slain it with his arrows—with arrows, mark you, not meeting it hand to hand with a spear as Barak had often done. True also, that in the foray which the Amalekites had made on the tribe during their last march the stranger had fought stoutly.

But any tribesman would do as much. As for other things—the choosing of pasturage, the tending of flocks, the pitching of tents, the stranger was as awkward as a ten-year-old, more awkward in fact, since the ten-year-old could make up in instinctive knowledge what he lacked in strength. How could Zipporah look upon him with favour? How could she compare that stranger to himself? No, Elihun was right. This cursed Hebrew must have cast a spell upon her.

Barak's fingers tightened round his spear shaft. He half rose as if he would go over directly and kill this alien, this Hebrew. He settled back again, his fear of the unknown restraining him. To kill the Hebrew in fair fight—the demons would overlook that; and Barak, indeed, had already taunted and insulted Moses in every possible way, hoping to provoke him to an onslaught. But what could you do with a man who, when you sneered at him for his awkwardness, asked how better to do what he was doing; or, when you pushed your flock in ahead of his at the wells, meekly held back? To kill him unprovoked? Who knew the strength of this stranger's gods? They must be powerful. Look how they had enchanted Jethro. Look how they had cast a spell over Zipporah. A stranger with strange gods that you did not know must be approached carefully. But, if one only knew the counter-charms to his spells!

Black rage boiled up in Barak again. As he stared across unblinkingly at Moses there was in his mind the remembrance of the whispers of the tribesmen and the giggling of the women and above all the memory of the night before when, coming with his flock to the wells, he had seen Zipporah there, looking with all her heart in her eyes after Moses. It had rushed jealously into his mind that they must have met in this way often, that this was the reason Moses had often given way to him at the wells. Was this to be endured? he asked himself now. Was he, who had been, according to custom, the accepted suitor of Zipporah

before Moses came, to allow this stranger to carry her off before his eyes and to become son-in-law of Jethro? By Behr and by Taku, god of killings, by That within the Ark Itself, no! Jethro must face the answer. Yes, Jethro would have his chance. And then, if Jethro did not follow custom, he, Barak, would be released from custom. Then, the demons would not touch him.

To a man like Barak when once, at last, action has been decided upon, it cannot brook delay. He got up from his seat. He flung one more glance at Moses. Then, with long strides, he went down the valley.

Moses watched him go. He wondered mildly what had occurred to take Barak from his flock in mid-afternoon. He thought no more of it than that. But that night, leading his flock down to the watering by the light of the rising moon, he discerned Jethro waiting at the wells. There was a stillness about the chieftain's attitude as he stood there which warned Moses that something was afoot.

"Greetings, Jethro," he said.

"Greetings, O Son of Amram," Jethro answered. He left the well-kerb and came forward. The two men faced each other. "Yahweh is limitless, Moses," Jethro went on. "Yet man's urgencies remain. The time has come when I must remember that I am chieftain of the Kenites as well as priest to Yahweh."

Moses stared at him. In the moonlight the chieftain seemed to grow in stature. Moses was conscious with part of his mind of the pale beards of the cooking fires among the palms to his right and of the querulous barking of dogs and of the camels grunting and of frogs croaking. A donkey brayed. It crossed his mind fleetingly, while he wondered what Jethro meant, that in the desert all these sounds seemed not to merge with the silence but to blend with it as if the silence itself were one great diapason. And it occurred to him that it fitted, somehow, Jethro's mood, and that indefinable impulses were stirring about the both of them.

"I do not know what was in Yahweh's mind when He brought you hither," continued Jethro slowly. "I have bowed in prayer to Him. But He does not answer. He leaves me to what wisdom I have. That wisdom tells me that we must make an end, one way or another. Barak came to me this afternoon."

Moses stirred a little, beginning to comprehend.

"As he sees it, he has justice on his side," Jethro went on, "justice and the custom of the tribe. Before you came he had announced his suit and no man had said him nay. Nor did Zipporah herself deny it. Barak is a man of violence, Moses. Let this yeast keep on working in him and he will either slay you

or strive to strike me down. Either way rests disaster. I must end this indecision. I must have some clear reason to refuse Zipporah to him. You have given me none. Yet to throw Zipporah into Barak's arms while her eyes turn towards you would be an ill thing. 'Twere better, if your heart is still closed to her, that you be not here for her eyes to rest upon."

The alternative lay before him, clear in the moonlight. Moses put his hand to his beard. To go forth, once more a wanderer? That would be foolish. After all, why should he hesitate? Tharbis was lost to him. Besides, he had come to realize as he watched the sheep and goats, that a man in the wilderness needs a woman to sleep with. Just that—to sleep with. Zipporah would do as well as any other, better than most, he reflected, remembering her attractiveness. So, why should he hesitate?

And yet there was Tharbis. He could still see her, turning on her heel; Tharbis whom he had loved, Tharbis whom he had trusted.

"I want no woman," he burst out. "Not any woman. Never again."

Jethro looked at him. "Was she so beautiful?" he asked quietly.

Moses was silent.

"No woman should be of that importance to a man," Jethro told him. "I am older than you, Moses. Listen to me. When God made man He dug his fingers into the clay, clay that is tough, clay that is tensile, clay that can be pounded by the thousand hoofs of Destiny and yet be moulded afresh by His hands into what He wills. But woman—who can say of what she is made? Our poets in the wilderness sing of her. There are those who say that she is compounded of the colours of the sunset, changing as the light on water, fragile as the cobwebs the spiders spin on the thorn trees. There are others who sing that she is formed of the cloud, which, when a man tries to grasp it dissolves through his fingers; or that she is as the mirage which lures you with promises of its greenness and its coolness until you are sick with the desire and the thirst for her, but when you come to her, she is but the flinty shale on the barren hills; and still others that she is the well of comfort, the water of desire, more priceless than the winking points of diamonds, more mature and more eternal and deeper, far deeper in her rich emotions than man.

"This is what they say. Which is but to say that no man knows really what a woman is nor does she know herself. But I say to you, Moses, each man reads into a woman his own concept of her, and she, if she is wise, shows to him only what he wants to see, whether it be the reflection of himself or the mirage of

what he thinks she is. And so man mistakes them. He thinks that woman deceive him. In reality he deceives himself. He puts into woman a soul which is not there. I know not who this woman of yours was, Moses. But I say to you that if you expected in her that singleness of purpose, that tough obstinacy to follow one's goal which a man must have, if he is to be a man, it was folly. It is folly for a man to set his course by the stars which he thinks he sees in a woman's eyes. Perhaps she deceived you. Think nothing of that, Moses. That is the nature of the cheap among women. But I say to you, whoever she was, that it is worse than folly for a man who has been called by Yahweh to be shattered by the thoughts of a woman. A man needs a woman, Moses. The wise man, the man who is called by Yahweh, takes his need of her and goes his way until his need rises again. Be wise, Moses. Your woman, whoever she was, is part of the past. You must look to the future, the future marked out for you by Yahweh when He brought you hither."

"But what is that future? Yahweh hath not told it me."

"He will. If you believe in Him, He will. When we come to Sinai——"

"Then give me till Sinai, Jethro. Let me wait till Sinai."

"You asked for time before."

"I know. But Sinai, Jethro. We will come to Sinai in ten days at most. Sinai is the abode of Yahweh, is it not? There, if anywhere, He will speak to me."

Jethro reflected a moment. "The ways of Yahweh are mysterious ways," he said finally. "This may be His will. I will wait till Sinai, Moses."

The sheep were watered. Moses shepherded them back slowly to their pasturage, his mind busy: pictures, made strange by the moonlight, floating through his mind, of himself as a boy, so many years ago, riding in the gold-mounted chariot of the Princess Bint-Anath through the green fields by the Nile, the peasants looking up from their work, the sun bright on the river, the boats gay. Life had seemed simple then. So had it with Niiy, that laughing girl whom as a boy just burgeoning into manhood he had taken in the fields in the shade of the palms outside On. Ipuwer, he recalled, had been telling them that day in his grave voice that all around was illusion, seeing that there was only One Eternal, One Reality of which all the objects that the eye saw and all the sensations that the senses experienced were but a shifting ever-changing shadowy reflection.

But Ipuwer had not known Niiy and her firm breasts and sweet-scented, laughing mouth. Nor had he known Tharbis and the exquisite grace with which she moved, grace that was

beauty itself, grace that was compacted of the flowing streams and the grass swaying in the wind and the palms tall against the sky. Ah, if he could but forget her! Was she illusion, too? Then, by what could a man guide himself? Then, what was this Reality, this Eternal which was so perfect and of which all things visible were but imperfect reflections? Was Yahweh, too, an illusion? On what could a man lay hold? If it was all illusion as it seemed in the moonlight, why should he trouble about taking Zipporah? If Yahweh were a God, let Him take away this hurt.

He stopped abruptly, seeing a shape rise up from the shadows by the palms. His first thought was of Barak. His hand swept to his dagger's hilt. But the voice that spoke was not the voice of Barak.

"I must speak with you," Zipporah said.

His hand came away from the dagger. He noticed how soft and appealing her face was in the moonlight. He breathed in the aura of femininity around her. In spite of Tharbis his voice was gentle.

"It is not well for you to be this far from the tents," he said.

"I know." There was a sob in her voice. "I was by the wells when you spoke with my father."

"You heard?"

"I came down to look at you, Moses. Only to look at you."

It is flattering to any man to have an attractive woman let him see clearly her love for him. In the soft silver of the moonlight, looking at her with eyes which were not wholly the eyes of Aahmose, Prince of Egypt, but in part, at least, the eyes of Moses, the herdsman, it occurred to him that she would be pleasant to sleep with. It also occurred to him, with a sense of power, that this girl loved him so utterly that he could take her and do with her as he willed. At this very moment he could take her if he willed. That would be sweet—after Tharbis whom, like a fool, he had approached with reverence. In a way, it would be an insult to Tharbis and his memory of her.

He took a half-step towards Zipporah. But then he remembered that this was Jethro's daughter, Jethro who had saved his life and who trusted him. Besides, this girl herself had tended him when he was weak and helpless, tended him with a devotion which, a part of his mind suggested to him, Tharbis would never have shown. To take her scornfully—that would not be right. And, perhaps, too, he thought, looking at her, her great eyes liquid in the moonlight and gazing up at him so appealingly, perhaps, all women were not alike. There was, for instance, his mother, Jochebed.

He dismissed this weakening thought. If one became involved, really involved, with any woman, would it not be to lay oneself open to hurt again? Women, all women, yes, even this Zipporah here, were skilled in deceit. How did he know even now what she was really thinking? Tharbis, too, had told him that she loved him. Tharbis, too, had given herself to him, willingly. And yet, all the time, Tharbis—no, if he was to take Zipporah he would take her as a woman—nothing more.

So he thought, standing there indecisively, not realizing that the civilization which he had, lately, come to deplore was holding him back and that, if he had been a tribesman, there would have been no such complicated considerations to deter him from his physical desire. Fear of consequences or of breaking some taboo might have held a tribesman back. But not the thoughts which were keeping Moses inactive, which made him take his gaze from Zipporah's face and softly glimpsed figure and look away to the hills, seeing them etched black and sharp against the sky by the low-riding moon, as if they were cut out of papyrus. It crossed his mind that in moonlight human moods are altered so that what one thinks and feels under the moon will scarcely bear analysis in the sun. This girl, some treacherous weakness whispered to him, was a human being. She could suffer, and he, who knew now how intense the suffering of the mind could be, felt unwilling to cause her suffering. He looked again at her, intending to tell her calmly that all he wanted was to be left alone. Once again her beauty in the moonlight disturbed him. Desire, he told himself confusedly, had not died with Tharbis.

"I am sorry you heard," he said to her, his voice rough under the stress of his conflicting emotions. "Believe me, Zipporah, I am not worthy of what you think of me."

"It is something I cannot help."

"Believe me if my heart could turn to any woman, it would turn to you."

"That was not what I came for," Zipporah said, looking down, her voice low and hesitant. "I came to tell you that you do not need to go forth to wander in the desert. I will not trouble you further. I—I will wed with Barak."

It is an ironic commentary on human nature that now, when there lay before him the solution for which he had been wishing that same afternoon, Moses was not pleased by it. A moment before he had been imagining this shapely girl in his own embrace and in so doing, although he did not realize it, had made her partly his and himself, in part, hers. A touch of jealousy permeated him. This girl was desirable. Who knew if, after Sinai . . . ? In any case, need he fling her into Barak's arms?

"No," he said. "Sooner far would I go out into the desert."

"That would be even worse for me." She lifted her face up to his. "Not to know how you were, to think of you as hurt or wounded or as you were when I first saw you. Do not be so cruel to me, Moses."

Moses hesitated. Might this not, too, he was beginning to ask himself, be part of the will of Yahweh? It was not so long ago that neither this girl nor he had been aware of each other's existence. Yet in the pattern of the world, from long ago, this must have been planned, two lives, his and Zipporah's, stretching blindly through time until suddenly they each came round a corner and met each other. And she was very desirable, too desirable. The words were dragged out of him.

"Wait," he said. "Wait till Sinai. There, if Yahweh wills, perhaps——"

He did not finish the sentence. She seemed to sway towards him. He turned abruptly and went away. Zipporah looked after him. Her face was transfigured. For Zipporah was quite woman enough to know that Moses had been moved with desire towards her. There was a little sob of joy in her heart.

CHAPTER V

THE wadi was deep, almost like a gorge. On either side marched serrated, rocky hills. Beneath the hoofs of the sheep and the goats and the camels and the donkeys and the feet of the tribesmen, the ground was flinty and barren and monotonous. Of life beyond themselves there was little—first a raven and a tamarisk, then a tamarisk and a raven. And there was a hush over them all so that the dogs did not bark nor a single sheep bleat; and an imperceptible quickening of their pace, as if an urgent expectancy, too deep for the usual turmoil of the march, drove them on.

And then in the late afternoon the valley swung round. Ahead was a chalk-white cliff and beyond it a deep gorge opening into a plain, the plain of Sinai. The tribesmen raised a shout, and the hills contemptuously flung it back, as if sound itself were a profanation in this setting. Moses scarcely noticed. He had stopped, staring to his right. There a huge mass of rock towered up in rugged majestic peaks, tawny gold against a violet sky. It was so eternal, so magnificent, so solemn that his heart rose in his throat. On such a mountain only a God could dwell, looking out eternally from the mass of the eternal mountain. Such a God could not be little. Such a God could not be small enough to

concern Himself with the petty details of human life, its lusts, its passions, its tiny fears and defeats. No, a God who dwelt there would move only for a mighty purpose, for earth-shaking events, for everlasting principles, staring down at feeble men as a giant looks on an ant, scurrying hither and thither about his feet. Abruptly his own sufferings and his own fate seemed very small to him. The Holy Mount! Did Yahweh really walk on that mountain top? But if He did, would He speak to him?

The tribe had pitched their tents on the plain of Sinai. That night the braying of the rams' horns brought all the people to the high altar of Yahweh, set on the little knoll outside the camp. Standing before them in the light of blazing torches, Jethro, the priest of Yahweh, slit the throats of younglings of the flocks, of lambs and of kids, and laid them on the altar as a burnt offering to Yahweh, the Lord God of Sinai. As the flames and the stench rose up, a sweet savour to His nostrils, raising his hands high, he entreated Him to watch over His people, the Kenites, and to make their flocks and herds fertile and their women to multiply and their enemies to be blown away as dust before the breath of Yahweh. It should have seemed a barbaric scene to Moses, the torches and the ragged beard of flame tossing up into the darkness from the altar and Jethro's gaunt figure, his hands stretched up to heaven, and around on every side amongst the shadows the up-turned faces of the people watching.

But Moses did not think of it as barbaric. What he felt was a sense of awe, a humbling of his heart, an expectancy from which he shrank in fear and yet towards which his soul stretched forward like a man caught in a current which sweeps him towards a whirlpool and he does not yet know whether he will survive or not. As the sacrifice was done and as the tribe turned to revelry, he did not join them. With sombre, inward-looking eyes he watched the fires lit and the sheep and the kids of the offerings roasted whole over the flames so that the people might partake of the sacrifice which Yahweh had blessed. With a spirit that was alien he observed the feasting from the great cauldrons heaped high with rice and meat and the women and children coming in to lick up the remnants when the men were done. And then the skins of wine saved against this day of homecoming were brought out and men and women drank and laughed and danced around the fires, and couples slipped away into the darkness and, for once amongst the Kenites, there was mirth and jollity and licence. For such was the custom of the tribe from time immemorial on the night, when after their year-long wanderings, they returned to Sinai and the sacrifices to Yahweh were done. For on this night the older gods, the gods whom

Yahweh had crushed beneath His feet, crept out of the darkness of their hiding places and their brows were broadened and the deep laughter of Lilith was heard once again.

But Moses stood in the shadows and his soul was revolted within him. For to him in his high mood, this seemed sacrilege and worse than sacrilege so that he turned towards the Holy Mount, etched black against the sky, and waited for Yahweh to send forth His lightning. But no lightning came. And Elihun, the Canaanite, reeled into him in the darkness and steadied himself and saw who it was and caught him by the arm and cried drunkenly:

"Come, stranger, you who were cast forth from Egypt, come and be merry. Yea, for once amongst these sour-faced Kenites there is wine to be drunk and women to be had for the taking."

Moses cursed him and flung him off and Elihun reeled away laughing. And then he was aware of Jethro standing beside him, still wearing his priestly robes, and looking at the revelry.

"And this," Moses said to him with a violent sweep of his arm, "this is the custom of your Kenites, this in the very sight of Yahweh."

Jethro transferred his gaze to him. "It is the custom of the tribe."

"A foul custom. I had thought the Kenites better than the tribes of Canaan or the peasants of Egypt. I had thought your Yahweh a holy God, a pure God. But this—man lies with woman and woman with man and none cares with whom."

Jethro leaned on the long staff he was carrying. "When you are older, Moses," he said calmly, "you will learn that men and women can only be suppressed so long. Aye, I know what you would say. Yet it is the truth. Would indeed that it were not so. Would that the animal within them did not need to break through the bonds. Yet the animal is there. It must have its day. Better to give it its day of freedom once in the circling year and then lock it in the dungeon than always to have it threatening to burst its bars."

"But Yahweh—your God?"

"Yahweh surely must understand that men—and women—are but feeble vessels."

But Moses would not have it so. "Nay, you belittle Him," he cried. "If Yahweh be the God of whom you have told me, then this is an offence in His nostrils."

"'Tis Yahweh who makes us fertile. And, surely, once in the year——"

"Nay, 'tis an abomination. What men and women do, that, it is true, may be necessary. But this—this licence—and after a

sacrifice to Yahweh—and to say that it is permitted, nay, blessed by Him as if He were the Goat of Mendes, that is, if He is such as my father, Amram, taught——”

He stopped. For at this moment he heard a woman cry out and turned, and there was Zipporah and Barak had her by the hand and was dragging her away from the fires against her will. With a fierce exclamation Moses rushed on Barak and caught him by the throat and wrenched him away and flung him back, stumbling. Barak was on his feet in a flash. His teeth drew back from his lips. His dagger was out and Moses plucked out his own. In that instant Jethro was between them.

“Stop!” he said strongly. “Beware.” And then to Barak. “Give back, my son. You know the law. He who sheds the blood of one of the tribe, by man’s hands shall his blood be shed.”

“He is not of the tribe,” Barak cried.

“He hath eaten my salt,” Jethro answered. “And he who slays my guest, slays me.”

“He will not slay me,” Moses said, speaking between his teeth.

“Then fight me for Zipporah,” Barak cried out to him. “That, too, is the law. When two tribesmen dispute over a woman, then shall they fight and he who lives shall wed the woman. Is that not the law, Jethro?”

The matter was out of Jethro’s hands. He looked at Moses. Moses glanced round him. He saw the crowd that had gathered. To fight Barak—that was simple. But to fight Barak, and win, was also, he realized, to be committed to wed Zipporah—Zipporah, who, perhaps on other nights like this . . . Fool that he was, he had been thinking of her as pure, as being a maid, as having him for her first love. All women, he told himself in sick disgust, no matter what you hoped of them, were at the last alike. Turning, he broke through the group and, careless of the jeering laughter he heard behind him, plunged into the darkness.

Moses got up from his knees. Above him towered Sinai. He glanced around him hopelessly. Around him was only the darkness and above him was Sinai. He stared up at it. Like a huge blunt fist it thrust itself up into the sky. But there was no sign as he had hoped when he had come here to drop on his knees and pray, no feeling of any mighty Presence stirring on that mountain top. His hands hung at his sides, hopelessly, helplessly. So Yahweh, too, was an illusion. His lip curled in the darkness. So this was the end of the hope that he had been driven out of Egypt for some great purpose.

He felt despair. In his ears rang the laughter he had heard as he flung away from the camp, and before his eyes was the look

of disappointment and dawning contempt in Jethro's face. It seemed to merge with other faces, the face of Merneptah and of the Egyptians round him when he had said that he was a Hebrew. And Tharbis, too, looked at him in this moment, Tharbis with an expression of scorn in her eyes.

What was he to do? He could not return to the tribe, not after fleeing, as they thought it, from Barak's challenge. Even Zipporah would scorn him now. Cast out from Egypt as a thing beneath contempt. Scorned now even by these barbarians, these Kenites. Where was he to go? Was there any use in going further, a man foredoomed to failure? And now his hope in Yahweh, too, was an illusion. Though why should Yahweh, if Yahweh existed, trouble about him, an exile, a man in whose hands everything he hoped and planned turned to sneering, a man whom women deceived? And did not, while he stood here, disconsolate and alone, at this drear hour of the dead night, Tharbis sleep soft in some Egyptian's bed? He was sure of it. She was a wanton, that one. Yes, he could see her the wanton: The sweat stood out on his forehead. He looked around him wildly. But there was still nothing but the darkness and the silent mass of Sinai. He was so alone, and before his eyes appeared the face of Merneptah and Merneptah laughed at him. Abruptly, he drew forth his dagger and tested the edge of it with his thumb. One thrust—so easy.

But as he thought this he was conscious, as it were, of the faintest breath of a chill air about him. He stared around him once more. He could see nothing. He could hear nothing. There was no wind. But it seemed to him that the quality of the darkness had changed. It seemed to him that Something was approaching through the darkness. And it seemed to him that a Voice said: "Put up your dagger, Moses." Fear seized his knees. What if he were wrong? What if Something did dwell on the mountain? And what if that Something was approaching—approaching towards him who had blasphemed Yahweh in his mind? The dagger fell from his hand to the ground, unregarded. There was another puff of that chill, that deadly air. He dropped on his knees again. He fell on his face on the ground. He seemed to feel the Presence gathering round him. He made himself small. He waited and his mind was blanked of thought, as if Something had brushed a sponge across the tablet of his brain. So he waited. After a while—whether it was long or short he could not have told you, but it seemed interminably long—he thought he heard a Voice in his mind. It was not a human voice. It did not speak in any language that he had heard. But he understood what it said. He thought the Voice asked:

"Art thou Moses whom I brought out of Egypt?"

He answered in his mind: "Yes, Lord."

"Then why dost thou not prepare thyself for the purpose I have for thee?"

He said: "What is Thy purpose, Lord?"

And the Voice said: "Oh, Moses, Moses, have I brought thee across the river of tribulation and over the desert of desolation and still thou dost not know My purpose?"

He said in a small voice: "No, Lord."

And the Voice said: "When thou art ready for the task I would have thee do, then it shall be revealed to thee. Till then, make thyself ready."

And he said: "How can I make myself ready, Lord? Lo, I am here, homeless and a fugitive. Did not Egypt spew me forth? And now even the Kenites despise me. I am not worthy, O Lord, that Thou shouldst trouble Thyself with me."

But the Voice answered: "I have chosen Thee, Moses. Did I not put it into thy mother's heart to give thee to the Princess of the Egyptians so that thou mightst be prepared to become a leader of men? And did I not save thee in the desert and bring thee to the tents of Jethro, priest of Yahweh? Lo, I say unto thee that thou shalt be a leader of men. And, lo, I say unto thee that in Mine own good time shall I bring thee back to Egypt, there to be a salvation to, thy brethren, the Hebrews, and a destruction to the Egyptians who are Mine enemies. In Mine own good time. But rivers start small, Moses. And thou are not yet ready. Behold I have given thee a field in which to make thyself ready. See that thou dost prepare thyself. For the Kenites are thy field."

He said: "What shall I do amongst the Kenites, O Lord?"

There was no answer. He waited. But still there was no answer. So, after a long while he got up from the ground. It was lighter now. He looked around him. There was no sign of anything or anyone. It was the same as before. He realized that he was chilled through. He saw a dull gleam on the ground and stooped mechanically and picked up his dagger. Abruptly the face of Barak floated before him and he saw his sneer and heard again the laughter of the Kenites. His own lips twisted into a fierce smile. He looked up at Sinai. Its peak was strong against the grey-white sky. Did not, for an instant, a rosy-pink seem to glow on that peak, as it were, the feet of God? He drove the dagger into its sheath. He turned and strode back to the camp. His mind was ablaze, exultant. He had been a weakling. He saw that now. Yes, he had allowed himself to be shattered by Egypt. Yes, all these weeks, whilst he had thought that he had been hating Egypt, weaning

himself away from it, he had been deluding himself. For in his heart of hearts he had been regretting Egypt, mooning after Egypt—yes, mooning after Tharbis. Tharbis! No, the thought of her would no longer unman him, would no longer prevent him from seeing before him the things he could do. The Presence was right. What mattered it whether he led the armies of Egypt or the barbarian tribesmen of the Kenites? What mattered it if he married Zipporah or not, whether she was chaste or not? The important thing was to lead. And what was the law of the desert? Did not the weaker go to the wall? Were not the poor in spirit driven off to the poorer pasturages! Be strong, be ruthless, be rocklike—that was the law of the desert.

The fires had died down. The tents were forlorn, bedraggled things in the pale light and man and beast were asleep in that sleep which is like death. Moses did not heed it. Sinai had completed the healing and the change which the long weeks of the wilderness had begun. He was once more Moses, the strong, the virile; but with a difference. For this Moses was not the spoiled youthful darling of the court. This Moses was a hard-bitten resolute man, who went straight to Jethro's tent and lifted the flap and called within.

"Ho, Jethro, I would have speech with you."

From within the tent came Jethro's voice, abruptly alert and cold as of a man who has been awakened from a deep sleep but has come alive all at once and reaches for his spear or his sword as he answers.

"Who would have speech with Jethro?" the voice said.

"Moses. A Moses who has returned to slay Barak and wed with Zipporah, your daughter."

"Barak may have somewhat to say to that," the voice answered dryly, after a pause.

He had no fear of the issue. Across from him Barak stood, his hawk face sharp and eager, his spear poised, waiting for the signal. Around were grouped the tribesmen. Moses glanced across at Sinai. Violet and russet the slopes quivered in the sun of morning. But there around the topmost peak a cloud hovered, a cloud that was rose and pink. Moses smiled grimly. He fitted an arrow to his bow. As Jethro dropped his staff earthward and as Barak swung back his spear, his teeth showing, Moses' arrow was through his throat before the spear could leave his hand. Barak stood a moment, a look of intense surprise replacing the ferocity on his face. Then he crumpled at the knees and fell softly forward in the sand. Moses drew another arrow from his quiver and fitted it to the string and looked around him. But

there was no movement of protest amongst the tribesmen. A fierce sense of exultancy filled Moses as he lowered his bow, a savage certainty that he had taken the first step on the road which the God of Sinai had willed that he should tread.

The same certainty accompanied him that night as, the barbarian rites and celebrations over, he lifted the flap of the tent in which Zipporah lay. The thought of Tharbis did stab into his heart. He shut it out roughly, violently. With the same violence he took Zipporah, not noting the trembling eagerness, the complete self-abnegation with which she gave herself to him. His soul was sick within him, had he allowed himself to feel it. But he refused. Male and female—that was the law of the desert. And Zipporah was desirable, was softly feminine.

Afterwards, as she lay by him, trying to bring herself still closer to him, her whole heart overcome by love and self-surrender, Moses stared up into the darkness. No, he would not think of Tharbis and in what bed she might be lying. He would not. Think of all things else. Think most of all of the Holy Mount and the God who dwelt thereon. Think of what that God had in store for him. As the slayer of Barak and the son-in-law of Jethro, the cloak of authority was now around him amongst the tribe. The tribesmen were good material, undisciplined but tough fighters and desert-hardened. His mind began planning busily, all the more busily since otherwise he would have leaped from this bed and flung himself from this tent out into the darkness again. All through his planning ran, like a thin streak of fire, the one thought: The God of Sinai had promised at some time to lead him back to Egypt—yes, back to Egypt.

CHAPTER VI

AARON glanced again at the letter in his hand. The words on it, wavering at first as if they were as surprised as he, began to fix themselves in place. He read them through. He looked up again at the man who had brought it, but this time his eyes were shrewd and appraising. This might be a trick.

"Do you know what is in this letter?" he inquired.

The man grinned at him insolently. "Do I look like a fool?"

Far from that, Aaron decided, noting the cunning deep-set eyes and the somewhat fleshy nose, its tip having the air of scenting for profit.

"It states here that your name is Elihun," he observed. "Are you, too, a Kenite?"

"Do you think a Kenite, a man of the desert, could find his way into Egypt with a caravan from Canaan and his path to Tanis, to the shop of Hadad, the Syrian, and not be caught?"

Aaron's eyes roamed round the inner room to which he had taken the man when he had said he had a letter for him. Everything in it testified to the wealth of Hadad, the Syrian. Yes, he could not be too careful. His eyes came back to Elihun.

"Then, why bring this to me, Hadad, the Syrian?" he demanded.

"I've told you. Moses said that Hadad, the Syrian, was Aaron, his brother and a Hebrew."

The bluntness made Aaron shudder. Nor was it pleasing to him that this stranger should know his secret.

"This Moses," he inquired, "who is he? I do not know him." Elihun put his hand to his neck. He broke a string and pulling out an object, held it out, string and all. Aaron took it. As he looked at it, abruptly eleven years dropped away, and he stood, not in Tanis, but in Avaris, and Moses was there, gay in his Egyptian robes, but with a lost desperate stare in his eyes. It was as if time, for once, had rushed backward. Looking behind him, Aaron found the couch and sat down.

"A chieftain of the Kenites, you said," he observed slowly. "Tell me of him."

Elihun glanced around him. He found a chair and pulled it up and sat down, making himself comfortable. Aaron learned that in those eleven years Moses had organized and disciplined the Kenites and had taught them the use of the bow and Egyptian ways of fighting. A certain Jethro, Elihun pointed out, who was also Moses' father-in-law, was the priest and titular head of the tribe. But in all practical matters Moses was the leader. He had shattered the power of the Amalekites. Tribe after tribe had been absorbed or annihilated until all the peninsula of Sinai had become the ranging ground of the Kenites. Then Moses had moved across the gulf of the Narrow Sea, driving back the Midianites, and up through Moab and Edom to the sea which is called the Dead, and across the waste land to the fertile oasis of Kadesh, which is south of Beersheba.

"We are a power in the desert," Elihun went on, a trifle boastfully. "From Kadesh to Moab and Midian is ours. So is the whole of Sinai. Our raiders drive into Canaan and the people flee before us. Moses, our chieftain, has turned us from rabbits into lions."

To Aaron, Moab and Midian and Sinai and even Kadesh and Canaan were merely names and little more. Nor could he as yet pick out from Elihun's words the purpose of his coming. If Moses had prospered, that was well. Yet what had it to do with Aaron?

"This letter says that you will tell me why you have been sent," he hinted.

Elihun paused, estimating the man in front of him more closely. Elihun, the Canaanitish outcast, was crafty. When it had seemed that Barak would rise to power among the Kenites, Elihun had attached himself to him. But when the arrow from Moses' bow had snuffed out that light before it was really lit, Elihun had been quick to reorientate himself. He knew that every leader must have one man on whom he can depend entirely in his moments of weakness as well as in his hours of strength, one servant to whom he can entrust the carrying out of his secret purposes, and he had resolved to be that one man for Moses. To do him justice, he had served Moses well, keeping him in touch with the feelings of the tribesmen, bringing to him those eddies of intrigue and half-formed currents of action about which every leader must know and, likewise, completing with fidelity the missions entrusted to him. To him this particular idea of Moses' seemed absurd and profitless. Yet he was quite determined to do his best by it, and Aaron, he judged, would be a difficult man to persuade. He said flatly:

"You are a Hebrew."

Aaron considered this. There was no one by. He nodded cautiously.

"I have seen them," Elihun continued. "Slaves. Dogs beaten with whips. Thrust on stakes. What would you give to see them free?"

Aaron glanced up quickly. "All I have," he said, without an instant's hesitation. He paused. "That is," he added, "if I were convinced that the plan was sound."

Elihun nodded to himself as if satisfied, since before he had left Sinai he had drawn from Moses all that he knew about his brother. In addition, after reaching Tanis, Elihun had spent several days in the bazaars picking up bits of information here and there and putting them together.

"Your brother, Moses, has a plan," he told Aaron.

Aaron leaned forward. He listened. When Elihun had finished he sat back.

"Fantastic," he stated shortly.

Privately Elihun agreed with him. For that same reason he was the better prepared to argue the point.

"A wave from the desert has rolled over empires before now," he reminded Aaron.

"This is Egypt. Living in the desert has made my brother forget the might of the Egypt of today."

"Is Egypt, think you, as mighty as it was?"

Aaron stared at the Canaanite, his mind beginning to chew on this thought as Elihun went on to point out that for a decade no Egyptian army had marched up through Canaan and Syria, so that the kinglets had become semi-independent and the raids from the desert tribes were more daring each year. He mentioned how the Kheta were drifting southward. He referred to the constant pressure from the Peoples of the North.

"Have I not heard, too, since I came to Tanis, that now the Libyans are filtering into the Northland of Egypt itself and no man drives them back? Does it not seem to you, Aaron, that the world is moving to a change? Perhaps a day such as that when the Hyksos shattered Egypt comes again."

Aaron was recollecting how at times he had had the same thought and had, indeed, held it out to his groups of young men. He said:

"There is still Rameses, the Pharaoh."

"Rameses is old. Can he live forever?"

"You mean that when Rameses dies . . . ?"

"Yes. That is Moses' plan."

Aaron's eyes were narrowed in thought. Rameses had, indeed, ruled so long that his reign had begun to seem interminable. In other lands kings and princes came and went. But in Egypt men and women were born, came to maturity and died, and still Rameses sat on the throne of Holy Kham so that he had outlasted men's memories and the epoch had become his and the very legend of his name lulled Egypt to a false security. But let Rameses die . . .

"At that moment Moses plans to strike," observed Elihun, anticipating Aaron's thought from the flash in his eyes. "All Egypt will be in confusion. Canaan and Syria are already ripe for revolt. If, at that moment, while Moses assaults from without, your Hebrews, who are in Goshen on the eastern frontier attack from within, would not the forts of the eastern frontier fall? That is what Moses wished me to ask you. Will you prepare the Hebrews? Will you strike with Moses when Rameses dies?"

Aaron stroked his beard. In these later years much of the enthusiasm had evaporated from amongst his bands of young men, as had, indeed, been inevitable in default of any definite issue to which to look forward; and Aaron himself, with increasing duties in his shops and with the first edge of his own enthusiasm dulled, had become discouraged. He could see, however, that if he were to fall in with this plan so that he could suggest a definite date, the death of Rameses, he could at once reawaken the spirit of his bands. He felt inclined to try it. Besides Rameses was old. Already he had ruled for three and sixty years and was by now

well into his eighties. He could not live forever. And Moses was right, he told himself. He had not thought of it before. When Rameses died, there was almost certain to be an upheaval, rival claimants for the throne, uprisings throughout the empire. The plan might seem, did seem, fantastic. Yet was not any plan, however fantastic, better than the long agony of the Hebrews? Besides one could organize and yet not be finally committed to the plan. One could draw out at the last moment, if the plan seemed, at the crisis, foredoomed to failure. Yes, it would do no harm to consult Nun and Hur and Elkanah and the other elders of the Hebrews. He rose.

"We will talk of this again," he said.

"And, in the meantime?" Elihun inquired.

Aaron looked at him.

"My lodging costs me something. Now, this place here——"
Elihun swept his arm around.

"In the meantime, you will lodge where you are lodging," Aaron told him coldly. He made a gesture of dismissal. "I will see you tomorrow."

When Elihun had gone Aaron wandered about aimlessly in the room, stopping to set a piece of statuary right here, to straighten a hanging there, his mind not on what was around him. Aaron was not normally of a philosophical bent. Although he possessed eloquence and was capable of keen thought on anything practical, such as organization, it was seldom that he speculated on the deeper causes behind events. To hear of a brother whom you have never really known after eleven years' interval, during which that brother might well have perished a thousand times, and to find that that brother, who in your memory was an Egyptian prince, is now devoted to the same cause as yourself—this is sufficient to stir anyone to reflection. There was something almost frightening about such an occurrence as if the comfortable cover of ordinary life had been lifted and one had received a glimpse of strange forces seething and surging immediately beneath one's feet.

The abrupt resurrection of Moses began in fact to make Aaron remember his dead father's insistence on Yahweh and His purposes for the Hebrews. It made him wonder if life, instead of being as he, in practice, regarded it, a succession of unrelated events which a man used to the best of his powers, trusting to luck for the rest, might possess an inevitable movement which all his own puny efforts and those of other men could do nothing to deter, any more than the work of ants and the tiny obstructions they raise are of the slightest hindrance to the flood when it comes. Here was Moses. When he had said farewell to him

eleven years ago in Avaris, Aaron had never expected to hear of him again. Yet here he was. Was it possible that the dead Amram's mouthings about a Deliverer, which Aaron had taken as hallucination, had been instead a glimpse into some future plan? Was it possible that impractical visionaries like Amram, following what to Aaron had always been foolishness, possessed a closer grip on reality than men like himself who dealt with what they could see and hear, calling themselves practical and realistic?

Such speculations are tiring to a brain which is not accustomed to speculation. Aaron put down a vase decisively. He could hear Elisheba, his wife, raising her voice as she spoke to one of the maidservants. The reflection occurred to him, aroused by the sharpness in her tone, that both Elisheba and himself would soon be approaching middle age and he thought for a moment of their four sons, of Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. Nadab, he realized with a shock, was already eighteen. One would soon think of a marriage for him. That would not be difficult, not for the son of Hadad, the prosperous Syrian merchant. Yet if one were not Hadad, but Aaron, the Hebrew, fighting against the armies of the Pharaoh, what then? Yes, if this plan of Moses', fantastic and unlikely as it seemed, ever came to anything, the comfort of his life would be broken up. He would no longer be secure. He would be the sport of chance.

It is to Aaron's credit that he rejected this last thought instantaneously as traitorous. If his people could be delivered out of bondage, that was enough, he resolved. Yet he determined at the same time that whatever plans were made would have to be tested and triple-tested. Moses was a desert chieftain. What had he to lose? But, for himself—and not only for himself, for his family and Miriam and Jochebed as well—he had to be careful. He must not let enthusiasm and hatred destroy his judgment.

His last reflection had reminded Aaron of something else. With a glance out towards the shop and the thought that he must return to it as soon as possible, he went out of the room and passed down the corridor to the garden at the back. Jochebed, as he had expected, was sitting there in the sun near the grape-vine arbour, her gnarled hands crossed on her lap, her still face withdrawn and remote, as if she saw not the grass and the lily pool and the climbing vines and the fruit trees, but something in a far distant past.

What did she think about these days? Aaron wondered, in the unaccustomed mood of reflectiveness which was on him; and he realized for the first time that to a woman like Jochebed who had always been active, the disease which had attacked

her joints a few years back, crippling them so that she could only move with difficulty, must be extremely hard for her to bear. Yet he had never heard her complain. He came forward and touched her on the shoulder. She looked up at him. Aaron hesitated, scarcely knowing how to begin. Unexpectedly she said:

"I was thinking of Moses, Aaron. Do you remember the night he left us?"

Aaron did not like it. He did not like any coincidence which seemed to suggest that there might be strange things in this world beyond what a man could see or hear or touch. He said abruptly:

"It was of Moses that I came to speak to you."

"You haven't got news of him?"

There was such a trembling eagerness in her voice that Aaron was reminded unpleasantly that this Moses, the Egyptian as he had used to think of him, had always been his mother's favourite son.

"Tell me," she begged.

"He is still alive," Aaron said slowly, watching Jochebed's gnarled hands twisting in her lap. He knew what she wanted to know. "Safe and prosperous," he went on. A hint of bitterness crept into his voice. "That Moses of yours always lands on his feet. He must have been born under a lucky star. He is a chieftain, the chieftain of a desert tribe."

"Where?"

"In Sinai. Not five days' march from Egypt."

Jochebed leaned back with a long sigh. "Yahweh be praised!" she said.

"He has a wife and two sons," Aaron added.

"Who has a wife and two sons?" Miriam's voice inquired.

Aaron turned to look at the gaunt bitter face of his sister who had come into the garden, a tray of food for Jochebed in her hands.

"Moses," he said.

Miriam stood very still for a moment. Then she came forward.

"What's happened to him now?" she asked, starting to busy herself with Jochebed, as if the matter were of no importance to her.

"He's safe, Miriam," Jochebed cried. "Safe."

"Hum-ph," Miriam grunted.

CHAPTER VII

THE years had brought age to Nun, too. But age carves his lines in different ways, as if each work were to him a labour of love and one from which he may stand back and regard the result with the soul of a connoisseur. Where Jochebed was becoming a bowed and crippled old woman, gnarled like the branches of an old tree, Nun was as erect and as active as ever, somewhat shrunken it is true, like a stick, once full of sap, which has dried and withered, but none the less alert and vigorous. He was ploughing this morning behind the ox, pressing forward on the single handle so as to force the rough wooden point into the rich, black earth, while Joshua, his son, guided the ox with a switch, giving it commands in a voice which was already deep in spite of his ten years of age.

Nun could feel the sweat running down his face and trickling among the hairs on his chest and the smell of the earth was rich and comforting in his nostrils. Even so, however, although part of his attention, of necessity, had to be focused on his work, part of his mind, as always, was busy. It took in the level fields across which as far as the eye could see, others like himself were dotted. It perceived the bright sun, blazing at the zenith. It reflected that, with the new exactions of the Pharaoh, the Hebrews would be hard put to it to keep soul and body together with what was left them for their produce. It pondered on the levies of slave labour, which, in these days, were being driven off to work in the forts and storehouses which the Pharaoh was completing all along his eastern frontier from Avaris to the Bitter Lakes and at the new city of Pithom, which he had begun on the edge of Goshen, itself designed, like the forts, to protect Egypt from invasion from the East.

They had reached the end of the furrow. Joshua, with a quiet efficiency somewhat remarkable in a boy of his age, got the ox around and started on the return course. Nun pressed in the share which, in spite of the soft loaminess of the earth, made at best only a narrow trough, and began to follow it. It occurred to him, reflecting about the Pharaoh and his forts, that in these days both Rameses and Egypt thought only in terms of defence and protection. Egyptians did not serve in the army. They entrusted the defence of their land to hired mercenaries, to Sherden and Nubians and Libyans. Nun asked himself whether all this might not be a sign that Egypt was decadent, that they lacked a certain toughness, a certain strength of the

spirit, which, so history seemed to teach, was essential to a people who wished to survive?

He considered the thought, recalling how once before, in the time of Ikhnaton and Tutankamon, the Egyptians had put their trust in fortifications. In those days, highly civilized, and finding life easy and luxurious, the Egyptians had persisted in disregarding the signs of trouble in Asia. They had been glad to assume that some solution would be found which would not require them to sweat and suffer and risk wounds and death. And then the Hyksos had come. Barbarous and ruthless, they had ridden roughshod over the soft Egyptians, breaking through their fortifications, capturing their cities, slaying their men, raping their women. What was one to infer from that? Was one to infer that every civilization had in it the seeds of its own destruction, that to survive one could not become too civilized, that, as soon as a people began to put their trust in some impenetrable barrier against invasion, as Egypt was now putting its trust in the Wall of the Princes along its eastern frontier, it was a sign of its own coming destruction? It was, of course, a sad commentary on the human race that, to survive, one could not afford to become too civilized or to build up a life that was easy and graceful, but must retain a certain primitive savagery, a certain ruthless desire for conquest and power, or, at least, a grim will to resist.

Yes, that was what the records of the past seemed to teach. The records of the past seemed to make it evident that, for nations as well as for individuals, walls of brick and stone could not take the place of what some people would call "toughness" and others "an inner spiritual strength" and that when a people turned to the building of walls and fortifications against a possible enemy and put their confidence in them instead of in their own right hands and undaunted courage, the day of disaster was approaching. If that were so then the day of Egypt's destruction was somewhere behind the horizon of events. How far behind, one could not know. It would, undoubtedly, not occur until after his own time was over. And, probably and unfortunately, not in the days of Joshua, either.

It was time to turn round again. When the plough was once more set in its course, Nun glanced briefly at Joshua. A bright lad. Yes, even if he were his father, he could say that. And yet already you could see that Joshua was entirely unlike himself. For Joshua, if you looked at him impartially, was not speculative by nature. Give him a task to do and he did it with a thoroughness and efficiency uncanny in one so young. Try to lead him into discussions about broad motives and causes and Joshua

was lost. Nun was, in fact, overwhelmed for an instant by the mystery of how two beings, such as his wife and himself, coming together, should by a simple physical act produce a new being who became a new entity, having his own peculiar and distinctive qualities so that you could only watch in wonder and interest as they developed. God, he thought, if there is a God, must have the same feeling when he creates a new type of being or a new world.

And yet one could not, after all, expect Joshua to be like himself. He, himself, had been brought up in Memphis. He had gone to school, both in Memphis and at On. He had seen all the peoples of the world coming to Memphis. He had known comfort and civilization and luxury and to him, as a boy and a young man, the world had been an ever-expanding universe, constantly impacting on him with new facts and new ideas. But Joshua had had no schooling other than that which Nun himself had been able to impart to him at the end of a hard day of physical labour, when the mind is dulled by the weariness of the body. When he had tried to picture to Joshua what life had been like in Memphis in the old days and how the Hebrews of the epoch before the oppression had lived, Joshua had listened as one listens to a fairy tale. No, to Joshua life was bounded by the fields of Goshen and by the Egyptian overseers from whom a boy hid, if possible, and if it were not possible, was as quiet as a quail's chick scenting danger. As the lad grew up, his experience would widen.

Oh, yes, Nun thought bitterly, guiding the plough out at the end of the furrow, it would widen. The boy had already seen rape and beatings and torture. Soon he would see Tanis and Memphis and Thebes and, perhaps, even the country beyond the First Cataract. But he would see them with the eyes of a slave. He would look up, sweating and panting from under a block of stone to glance at a dainty Egyptian lady going by in her palanquin with jewels sparkling on her hands and wrists, and the lash would come hissing down. Set damn the Egyptians!

"It's almost noon," Joshua observed, looking up at the sun.

"We'll do one more round, son," his father told him. They turned down the field once more. As they moved along Nun smiled wryly at himself for proving again that a man can philosophize impartially about events so long as they do not touch those dear to him, but as soon as they do, he loses his perspective. No, there was no hope for Joshua, his son, even if, in the years to come, Egypt should fall. Such events take centuries to fulfil. Once, he remembered, as he plodded along behind the plough, he had thought of a great pattern of the universe, a pattern into

which, inevitably, the fate of both Hebrews and Egyptians was being woven by some superintelligence, a pattern, too, in which the Pharaoh and Moses, the son of Amram, both had a part. The pattern might still be true. But to think, as he had thought, that, perhaps, Moses was the Deliverer who would free the Hebrews from bondage was, quite evidently, merely an idea conceived by hope but dying in the womb of fact before it came to birth. Eleven years. The Pharaoh still ruled. The Pharaoh still shone bright in the pattern of events. But where was Moses?

The same thought, as it happened, had been in the mind of the Princess Bint-Anath. Still slim and still graceful in spite of the passing years, she was walking in the garden of her palace at Memphis, a sneering, dissatisfied look on her face as she ruminated the fact that with the death, the previous night, of the tenth son of the Pharaoh, there was now no one between Merneptah, the thirteenth son, and the throne he coveted, so soon as Rameses died. To the Princess there was, naturally, more than coincidence in the way in which in these past few years matters had so worked out that, of the first twelve sons of her father, all were concealed in the tomb except the one who now lay dead in Rameses' palace down the river. Anyone who knew the Princess Tiyy did not, in Bint-Anath's opinion, need to look any further, and she wondered that her father, who in her experience of him had been both acute and abnormally suspicious as well as jealous of his power, had not taken some action. But then ever since the flight of Moses and her own withdrawal from the court, something vital seemed to have gone out of the Pharaoh. Except for his mania for building he had left the government more and more to Merneptah. In effect, save for anything which touched on Rameses' new temples and statues and obelisks and forts and cities, Merneptah was Pharaoh. She, who hated Merneptah, couldn't do anything about it.

It was this which griped Bint-Anath. For the thousandth time, she cursed the day when she had first looked on Moses in his cradle and had felt the desire rise within her to adopt him. Yet, she reminded herself, stopping to stare unseeingly at the lotus blossoms resting placidly on the pool, if that young man hadn't made a fool of himself over Tharbis, the experiment would have turned out successfully. Moses had become what she had willed him to be, proud, successful, ambitious. And then Tharbis. Then that slut, that slut who was now keeping Merneptah's bed warm as well as those of a half-dozen others. She had seen her the other day, riding along languidly in her sedan chair in the insolence of a beauty which was still in its prime. That was another thing that cut—to see Tharbis prosper and

not be able to harm her. She felt a sneer at her own impotence rising within her. That Moses, wherever he was, had a great deal to answer for.

Tharbis, however, was one person in whose mind there was no thought of Moses. It is true that occasionally—but very occasionally—a fleeting recollection of him might cross her mind. It had no effect. Tharbis was too completely selfish and also too entirely wrapped up within her own present and immediate future to worry about what might or might not have happened to the husband who had loved her so deeply. Nor did it ever occur to her that her treatment of Moses had left something to be desired. For Tharbis was not the type of person to admit that she had ever acted wrongly. Such an idea never even crossed her mind. Instead, she was always discovering, or so she thought and so she expected other people, including Merneptah, to believe, that other people were always treating her most abominably. It wasn't her fault, she kept telling Merneptah and anybody else who was intimate with her, that if, although she herself was always most honest and never had an impure motive but was unfortunately impulsive, she was always getting into situations which evil-minded people could misinterpret. True, if any other woman got into the same sort of situation Tharbis was quick to draw the obvious conclusion. But it never occurred to Tharbis to apply the same arguments to herself. *She* was different.

At the present moment, however, she was not troubling herself overmuch about Merneptah's suspicions. Merneptah, stubbornly stupid though he was, could always have the wool pulled over his eyes. What she was thinking about was the tall young Northerner with the blue eyes and the blond hair, whom she had met at the palace that morning. Just the thought of him made her heart flutter while she leaned back on the couch and let the maid do her fingernails. By this time she could recognize the symptoms. She was attracted, definitely attracted—physically. Of course there was, unfortunately, the captain of the Sherden, also tall and stalwart, with whom she had had a violent affair these past six months—an affair which, so far as the Sherden captain knew, was still in full bloom. He was a jealous man, too.

Tharbis frowned for a moment, considering how best to get rid of the Sherden without any complications. He would be certain to reproach her. They all did. What they didn't realize, she told herself, was that a girl could be to all intents and purposes, violently in love with a man, and then, like this morning, she'd see another man and, presto, she'd know that she was going to be in love with him. Men could never seem to under-

stand that. They always blamed the girl. They said she was fickle. But you couldn't help it, if a new man attracted you, could you?

Tharbis decided that you couldn't. She reflected that she'd have to be especially nice to Merneptah and get him to send the Sherden captain away. That would clear that liability.

With a sigh of relief she stretched herself out on the couch and let her thoughts come back to the Northerner. That blond hair of his. Those eyes, blue as the sky and yet with a touch of cold in them. The very thought of them made her shiver deliciously. She could hardly wait for the moments to go by until this afternoon when, as she had suggested to him, she would take her chariot and show him the countryside around Memphis. She would be very queenly,—at first, anyway. That would be the way to impress this blond barbarian.

And meantime, Rameses the Great sat on the southern balcony of his palace and stared up through the palms towards Bint-Anath's palace. The years had taken the flesh off him so that the skin of his face seemed to be stretched tightly over his bones and his eyes had a curiously dead expression in them so that seeing him you would have stepped back, not knowing whether you spoke to a mummy or a man. But the pride was still there; and so was the cold relentless cruelty and the complete egotism.

At this moment, however, he was thinking that he had lived too long. A man, he said to himself, has lived too long when he perceives things which demand action and yet has not the energy or, worse still, the desire to take that action. For Rameses, like Bint-Anath, was sure within himself that the death of his tenth son added to the death some eight months before, seemingly by accident, of his seventh son, was not something due entirely to chance; nor did it escape him that it was suspicious that ever since that night when Bint-Anath and he had parted, events had conspired in such a way that Merneptah was now the undisputed heir to the crown. Still, he would do nothing. To act meant an outpouring of energy, energy which was badly needed for the one thing which still had meaning for him, his building. Action would mean investigation and the removal, probably, of Merneptah. Who could be put in Merneptah's place? That was the rub. No, he would do nothing. Let Merneptah have the throne when he himself was through with it. Merneptah with his dull obstinacy and his superstitions and his subservience to the priests would probably ruin Egypt. Well, let him. What did Egypt matter?

The Pharaoh stirred. He thought for a moment of his city at Pithom and of the lazy dogs of Hebrews, complaining that

they had no time for their farms and herds in Goshen. But then his eyes focused on the roof of his daughter's palace. If he were wise he would make his peace with his daughter and bring her back to counterbalance Merneptah and his old crone of a mother. That, too, would require energy. In addition, that young Hebrew she had foisted on him as her son—what was his name?—stood between. To bring Bint-Anath back would rake up the old scandal. No, let things take their course. That name—he had it now—Moses. Where was Moses now? the Pharaoh, too, wondered idly for an instant. He dismissed the wonder. Dead, in all probability. Or else a wretched fugitive somewhere. Now, regarding that statue of himself at Thebes . . .

Thus, each in his own way, the Pharaoh and Bint-Anath, Nun and Miriam and Jochebed and Aaron, all thought of Moses, estimating him as far-off and removed, completely or almost completely, from their lives. In the meantime, the fingers which were busy at the web of the pattern neither hurried nor hesitated.

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CHAPTER VIII

It was a month later. Moses and Jethro came out of the Tent of Meeting and paused as if by mutual consent. In the west were long lines of clouds, flushed with the sunset and flaming like the ragged banners of some retreating but defiant host. Below the little knoll on which they stood the green oasis of Kadesh lay peaceful, hushed with the hush of approaching evening so that all the mingled sounds, the flocks and herds being watered at the wells, the voices of men and women, the cries of children, the barking of the dogs, seemed to be clear-cut and distinct and abnormally loud and yet to have a quality of remoteness and unreality about them. Jethro's eyes travelled over the scene, noting the air of peace and security, the evident prosperity, the contentment. He drew in a long breath.

"Is it not peaceful, my son?" he asked and gestured, a gesture which took in the tents dotted thick under the palms and the green grass and the thronging members of the tribe. "You have come far these past years. You have made the Kenites a power in Sinai and in the desert round about. The choicest of the pasturage is ours. The tribe multiplies. We have possessions such as we had not dreamed of having. Why not be content?"

Moses glanced at him. He had a profound affection for Jethro and an even deeper respect. In these eleven years they had talked together so often that part of each had passed into the

other. On this point, however, they were at variance. He said:

"You heard what Elihun reported. My brother Aaron will organize the Hebrews against the day of the death of Rameses."

"Why trouble with Egypt, Moses? The Kenites are happy in the desert. They know no other life. Even if you were to conquer Egypt, what would they do with it? Civilization destroys men, Moses. The Kenites are far better in the desert."

"I did not think of conquering Egypt."

Jethro put his hand to his beard. "Then why attack her? What have we, men of the desert, to do with Egypt? Let Egypt go to perdition in her own way. You have your wife and your two children, Gershom and Eliezer. In all practical affairs you are chieftain of the Kenites. Why not be content?"

Moses paused. He looked off into the desert. Jethro had the unwilling thought that his son-in-law's eyes looked as if he saw eagles wheeling above mountaintops or as if he heard some far trumpet calling. It was a sobering reflection that few who had seen the Moses who had staggered into his tent, over yonder in the wilderness, would recognize him in this man with the stalwart, vigorous figure and the beaked nose and the bearded, weatherbeaten face, a face which was curved into the custom of imperious command. No, this was a Moses who knew, for good or ill, what he wanted and who took a direct and ruthless road towards his objective. Yet the other Moses, helpless before the blows of Fate and unsure of himself had been more appealing.

"It may be difficult to explain," Moses remarked at last. "But let us consider this, Jethro. Years ago I was saved from the desert. Years ago I slew Barak and wedded with Zipporah, your daughter. Did we not both see the hand of Yahweh, our God, in this?"

Jethro nodded.

"Yahweh, our God, dwelleth in Sinai. Yet, part of Himself, as we both know, He sendeth with us in That which dwelleth within the Ark. In these past years His fingers have reached out farther and farther from Sinai, so that for this month we dwell in Kadesh and yet His Presence is with us. We go up to the Dead Sea and across the Gulf of the Narrow Sea into Midian and His protection is still over us like the palm of some mighty hand. Yet, aforetime, the Kenites were hard put to it to maintain themselves in Sinai against the force of the Amalekites. Would you not say, therefore, that His power hath increased?"

It was not clear to the old man at what his son-in-law was aiming. "It would seem so," he agreed with a certain reserve in his tone.

"It has," Moses declared positively. "And why, Jethro? I will tell you why. Because the number of those who worship Him has increased. Now, if I were to add the Hebrews to the number of those who worship Him——"

He left the thought dangling. Jethro considered it. Both he and Moses were at one in their intensely personal concept of Yahweh as a mighty Presence who had, nevertheless, the form and some of the thoughts and impulses of humanity, although on an exalted plane. Both he and Moses, too, believed that other gods existed with whom the Power of Yahweh battled and that the Power of Yahweh tended to weaken the farther the Ark was removed from His Holy Mount, so that if That within the Ark were not brought back every so often to Sinai, its Power, too, would become faint like a perfume which is dissipated into the air unless it is renewed. Jethro could remember that he had always tended to believe that the sins of the Kenites brought down on them the punishment of Yahweh and that their good deeds were rewarded by Him. He could recall, too, that he had heard it argued that sacrifices were necessary so that a god might feed on the savour of them. But this new idea of Moses' seemed to him somewhat presumptuous. It made, as it were, a partnership for mutual advantage between Yahweh and his people. He said:

"Yet the Kenites are the peculiar people of Yahweh."

Moses swept the suggestion aside with an impatient gesture of his hand. "Did not the Hebrews, as you yourself have told me, in the years before they went up to Egypt, in the years of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, worship the Ancient of Days? Who was He but Yahweh, as, indeed, my father, Amram, believed? Now the Hebrews have forgotten Yahweh. Therefore have the Egyptians been permitted to oppress them. But six months ago, near Sinai, Yahweh revealed to me His Will." He turned to Jethro, looking at him with blazing eyes. "I tell you that it is His Will that the time has come for Hebrews to be freed from bondage and to be brought back to the worship of Him."

"They will have to be received by Him afresh," Jethro stated obstinately. "It is not every man whom Yahweh will receive, Moses. The Hebrews must be purified of their false gods first."

Moses dismissed this, too, with a wave of his hand. "The desert will purify them if need be," he observed. "It is Yahweh's will, too, Jethro, that the Egyptians be punished."

Jethro glanced at him. "Are you sure, my son?" he suggested softly, "that you have told me the real reason why you embark on this mad venture?"

"It is not mad. I tell you that it is Yahweh's will. Did not you yourself say that Yahweh had some great purpose in mind for me? Have you yourself not said in these past years that to me, too, from time to time Yahweh hath spoken?"

It was against this argument, since he himself believed in it, that Jethro had no answer.

"Well, if it be Yahweh's will," he observed dubiously.

"It is," Moses stated. He turned to stare once more over the oasis, but his eyes, Jethro noted, were once again fixed on something far beyond. The old chieftain sighed within himself, realizing that in these years he had in Moses begotten something which was now stronger than himself. As a man grew older, he reflected, his violence and his eager desire to accomplish and his revolt against things as they are seemed to evaporate, to be replaced by tolerance and a feeling that few things really mattered. Yet that very tolerance left a man defenceless against the energetic and against those with a fixed purpose and idea. He himself might feel that in Moses' purpose there was more than the simple desire to fulfil the will of Yahweh, yet it was not worth the effort to oppose him. The fleeting recollection of Zipporah, his daughter, and the question of her relationship to Moses crossed his mind. He wondered, as he wondered so often, if she were happy. He could not tell. A man could not enter within the circle of another's feelings, even if that other were his own daughter. He looked at the west. The light had almost faded from the clouds and they were cold and dull now as if the host had given up thoughts of resistance and was retreating sullenly and without hope. He said:

"I will go now."

Moses did not answer. As Jethro left him, he was still staring out beyond the oasis. Egypt, he was thinking. Yes, sometime, in the will of Yahweh, I will surely return to Egypt, return with fire and sword. Aye, they will come to know, Merneptah and those nobles who sneered at me when I was found to be a Hebrew, what manner of man they scorned. And Tharbis, the wanton—Tharbis who sleeps in Merneptah's bed. The vengeance I will take on them. My father is dead. Yet even he, in the Halls of the Dead, shall be happy when he knows that Egypt pays for the cruelties they have inflicted on the Hebrews, his people. For it is Yahweh's will! Aye, it is Yahweh who points out the way.

So he thought, gazing at this moment into the past and staring also into the future for which he hoped. It will be seen that his motives were mingled, a fact which is indeed true of those impulses behind most of the deeds of men. It will also be

recognized that, at this stage in his development, the Hebrews themselves did not figure as persons in his thoughts, persons who suffered and were outraged, but only as instruments for his plans. How could they? Except for the last two days of his life in Egypt he had looked on them, not as upon his kinsfolk, but as a prince of Egypt looked upon slaves, albeit that look, in the case of the Hebrews, had always been tempered by the memory that those particular slaves were Aunt Jochebed's people. But Moses himself had never suffered with the Hebrews. He had never seen his sister raped or his father beaten to death. His mind recognized that the Hebrews were his kinsfolk. His pride told him that it was outrageous that his kinsfolk should be in bondage to the Egyptians, who had scorned himself; and he, he told himself fiercely, Hebrew or not, was as good a man as any Egyptian. But the Hebrews were not, as yet, his people.

Egypt, he thought, staring out over the oasis, when I return to Egypt.

Down in the oasis Zipporah came out of her tent and put a hand to her brow. The years had only added to her beauty, a beauty which was of an entirely different type from that of Tharbis, in that, though not as exotic, it was deeper and more solid, not depending so much on grace and charm of line as upon the spirit which breathed out from her. Her glance reached Moses, standing on the knoll under the palms. Her hand dropped to her side. He looked at this moment so apart and so solitary and so sufficient unto himself that for a long moment, forgetting her purpose in coming out to search for him, she stood silent and immobile, her face falling into melancholy lines, as she wondered what this return of Elihun from Egypt might portend. A husband such as Moses was difficult for a woman who loved with Zipporah's complete self-effacement. There were so many times when she could not tell what he was thinking, when she felt entirely shut out from him, excluded—she, who in her love, as is the way of all women in love, wanted to share his every thought and mood. Was she happy, she asked herself. She should be happy. She had for her husband the man she loved, the one man, as she knew deeply, whom she would ever love. She could know with a sure feminine instinct that she was physically exciting and satisfying to him, so that in the eleven years of their marriage his desires had never wandered from her, nor had there been even the suggestion of a second wife; though that was usual for chieftains and Zipporah would never have thought of objecting, if Moses had suggested it. Yes, in the moments of their shared physical union she could feel that he was hers. And she had her children.

She ought to be happy, she answered herself. Yet she was

not. She craved so much more from him, some sign of tenderness other than the physical, some proof that he was really aware of her and appreciative of her and not using her as a convenience and a custom. A woman wants to be first with the man she loves and, even if the very fact that a woman is not sure of a man makes her love him more, yet she cannot help but strive to gain complete possession of him. In Zipporah's mind was always the haunting thought of that woman of Egypt called Tharbis, whom Moses had mentioned in his delirium and who, she knew intuitively, was the reason why he had hesitated so long before taking herself. Her name had never crossed his lips since those early days. Yet whenever he looked away from her into the distance, and whenever, even in intimacy, she sensed that his mind was far away from her, it was that same Tharbis who flashed into her mind and made her heart sick. Now that Elihun had been sent to Egypt and had returned, what news might he not have brought of her?

She turned away wearily. She called to Gershom.

"Son, go up and speak to your father. Tell him the evening meal is waiting."

When Moses came to his meal, he was not abstracted as she had feared. He was, for him, unexpectedly genial and talkative, kind to Gershom and Eliezer and to herself, praising the soup of herbs, enjoying the addition, from the oasis, of lentils and cucumbers and savoury greens to the lamb stew. She knew when he looked at her what he wished of her that night and a feeling of joy rose within her. Later, lying close to him, feeling the body of the husband she loved close to her, proud of the way she stirred him to desire, she told herself in ecstasy that she was happy, as happy as any woman could be. She did not know that Moses was more given to her than he had ever been because in the back of his mind he felt that he had surmounted one definite stage of the long journey back to Egypt. Nor did she know that as at last they lay quiet and while she was loving him with all of herself, so that she would have wished to become obliterated if she could have become a part of him, her husband's thoughts were far away. It was not that he did not desire Zipporah. Her attraction for him, indeed, had never ceased since that night when she had met him by the wells and had offered to wed with Barak. Had he been more curious about Zipporah, he would have realized this and would have comprehended that she had become a necessary and vital part of his life.

But man is a strange animal. That which he has he takes for granted, not stopping to consider how precious it is, and, like a child, his soul cries for that which is far off and which he

cannot have. It had been the tragedy of Moses that he had loved with his whole being a worthless woman. And yet, because of the circumstances of his leaving her, he could not forget her and fancied that he had nothing to give to any other woman, not realizing that, long ago, Zipporah had become more a part of him than Tharbis had ever been, or could ever have been. It was Zipporah's tragedy that she had not met Moses before he had been with Tharbis. Now, in the crazy way in which things are ordained in this world, she loved a man who was not, in a way, conscious of her existence. And so, at this moment, as he lay there, Moses was thinking, not of Zipporah but of Egypt, Egypt to which by the help of Yahweh, he would in due time return, Egypt and all that Egypt implied.

CHAPTER IX

MOSES stood on a little hillock of sand. To the south and west of him the waters of the Lake of the Crocodiles gleamed, incredibly blue, the reeds near the shore thrusting themselves up like bronze-tipped spears, the herons dipping and rising above them like flashing streaks of silver. Far out on that lake a single boat was heeled over before the wind, its narrow, triangular sail laid against the surface like the blade of a scythe; and on the golden beach below, the nets of the fisherfolk, hung out on posts, glistened with the silver scales caught in their meshes. Behind Moses, along the line of palms backed by the low, dun-coloured hills, the fighting men of the tribe were busy, putting up their black tents, getting ready to prepare the evening meal.

But Moses stared steadily northwestward. There in the distance beyond the tip of the lake, the battlements of a fort drew the eyes to it. If one looked closely, one could see a low line stretching northward from it and farther along, the battlements of another fort. Moses knew that he looked at the Wall of the Princes, which had been strengthened by Rameses the Great so as to secure Egypt from invasion. Scattered behind that wall were the soldiers of Egypt. Once more, after seventeen years, he looked upon the frontier of Holy Kham.

At such a moment a man has the feeling that a cycle of his life is completed. As Moses stood here, there was in his mind that night seventeen years before, when in despair and agony he had galloped forth from Egypt, his world shattered to bits around him. It seemed difficult to realize the feelings of that boy of so long ago. One could look at him now with pity and a

trace of wonder that he, Moses, could ever have been so foolish and so immature. The recollection caused a slight trace of discomfort within him, and he told himself that a man is not one person throughout his life but half a dozen different ones, and that if all these were to meet together at one time they would look at each other with interest, perhaps, but would be strangers to each other. What was there in common now between that young man of seventeen years ago and himself, the bearded, desert-hardened leader of the Kenites?

He glanced behind him at the line of palms, noticing the tribesmen moving about. The sound of them, their talk, the faint clink of weapons, the sharp crack of a stick being broken for firewood, came to him. His mind cast back over the six years since he had first sent Elihun to Egypt to his brother Aaron, as a fisherman throws out his line and draws it to him. It had seemed long to him in his impatience to wait. It had seemed at times as if Rameses would never die, as if for this one man the sun and moon stood still, while the world waited, entranced.

And then, in the sixty-seventh year of his reign and the eighty-sixth of his life, Rameses had died.

The event had been so long expected that it took people by surprise. In the stunned shock of it, Egypt and the lands around it lay quiet, as a man lies still after a blow has felled him. In that interspace of time Merneptah ascended the throne; and immediately all the priests and the soothsayers and the magicians flocked around him, knowing that from him they would reap a harvest such as they could never be sure of from the unpredictability of Rameses the Great.

Merneptah's first measures, however, were sound. Shiploads of grain were sent to the Kheta, to relieve a famine there and so strengthen them as a barrier against the Peoples of the North. The burdens on the Hebrews, already intolerable, were increased in order that the mercenaries of Egypt might be fed and paid, and so that the fortress-city of Pithom, on which work had lagged, might be completed. Proclamations were sent out to Kush, to Syria, to Libya, to Canaan. It seemed for a while as if the new Pharaoh might rule in peace; and over in the desert Moses fretted as a racehorse frets at the starting line when the signal is delayed.

But then the storm broke. It was as if the world had paused for a held breath to contemplate the spectacle of the Great Rameses—dead—and now, satisfied, rose up, crying: "Rameses we know. But who is Merneptah?" Beyond the cataracts Nubia revolted. On the western border of Egypt, the Libyan Tehenu began to stir. Through Canaan and Syria revolt ran like a

leaping flame. Over in Sinai, Moses flung the Kenites against the fort of the Egyptians at the turquoise mines and took and sacked it. And then the news spread throughout the tribes that Merneptah had led his army out from Egypt into Canaan. Under the Mount of Sinai a great pile of firewood blazed, sending up a pillar of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night. Other fires took up the signal, spreading the news to all the tribes which were by now affiliated with or subject to the Kenites, to Edom and Moab and Midian and Amalek: "The day has come. Egypt is undefended. Down to Egypt. We will feed fat on the plunder of Egypt." And now Moses stood with thousands of fighting men on the very edge of Egypt.

The knowledge of all this was within Moses' mind as he stood on the hillock and stared across the lake and the wind-swept dunes at the Wall of the Princes. Soon, he thought, drawing himself up, he would smash that wall. Soon, he would be in Egypt. And, once he was there, what vengeance would he not take from his enemies? Had not the God of Sinai promised it? Was not all this which he had accomplished but the working out of the will of the God of Sinai?

He drew in a long breath. He fell to wondering briefly how Merneptah was faring in Canaan and what news Elihun the Canaanite, whom he had sent to watch the progress of the campaign, would bring when he returned. Moses had little doubt, really. There was not even a question in his mind that it was by the will of the God of Sinai that his tribesmen were now ranged under the line of palms along the lake, and he was certain that the God of Sinai would see to it that the plan which He Himself had inspired was brought to fulfilment. But he wished that Aaron would come. Aaron was two days late already. Without Aaron and news of the readiness of the Hebrews to assault the wall from within he could not move. In the meantime the tribesmen were getting restless. One could rouse them with an idea as a wave is roused by a great wind. But let the wave be checked and it recedes.

Moses stared earnestly to the north. The sandy dunes were bare of movement. Shrugging his shoulders he turned from the hillock. The boat which had been far out on the lake was, he noticed casually, drawing into the beach, and, as he watched, the narrow sail came down with a rush and a man took his place in the prow, a long pole in his hand, to check the boat's little rush upon the sand. Moses smiled, observing that, in spite of this, the jar had sent the other occupants tumbling. He started to walk past on his way to the palms. A man got out of the boat and plashed to the shore in front of him. There was something

tantalizingly familiar about his appearance. It drew Moses' closer attention. The hair and beard were shot through with grey, and the shoulders were more stooped than he had remembered. Yet it was he.

"Aaron!" he cried out gladly, hurrying forward. The man turned and looked at him. It is not a matter of surprise that he did not recognize in this bearded stranger, clad in rough woollen cloth, the Moses who lived in his memory as a smooth-skinned Prince of Egypt, elaborately decked out in linen kilt and pointed sandals and curled wig. He stared at Moses with a frown of perplexity on his face.

"I'm your brother," Moses said. "Don't you know me?"

Aaron accepted the fact. The two brothers clasped hands. They spoke a moment or two of trifles. Moses said that he had been waiting for two days. Aaron explained that the Wall of the Princes was so well guarded that he had had to travel roundabout from Goshen so as to get to the south of the forts. All the while the two men were estimating each other. To Moses, Aaron was in essence the same. The seventeen years since that night in Avaris might have put more wrinkles on his face and a deeper shrewdness and cynicism into his eyes. But whatever had happened to him had only accentuated the qualities he had already had. In Aaron's brain, however, the question: "Can this be Moses?" was persistent. It was not only the tangled hair and the face, seamed by the wind and the sand. There also clung to this brother of his the air of wild and open spaces and of a life which was free and strong and uncompromising. Nor did the stern lines about the mouth and the grimness of the eyes escape Aaron. This man, he felt, was a stranger. But he was also a leader. For the first time a measure of hope in this wild plan which he had supported arose in him.

But Moses had noticed the two others who had stepped from the boat and were waiting silently. He turned to them, his keen eyes taking them in. The one was a young man, scarcely past his youth, in fact, who stood straight and stalwart, his shoulders thrown back, and watched him with eyes which were full of worship. The other was spare and bent and old, and his white beard swept to his waist. It was the old man who stepped forward, seeing the question in Moses' eyes.

"You do not remember me," he said. "Cast back your mind, Aahmose, Prince of Egypt. Can you remember a stake near Avaris and a man in the hands of the guards of Aakim?"

The words, as Nun had intended they should, brought back the memory as if a veil had been swept aside from a painting on a wall. For a moment Moses felt the hot sun. For an instant he

saw a Hebrew slave writhing upon his stake and looked down at a face which stared up at him in anguish. A faint trace of surprise accompanied the memory. In the picture Nun was already old and it was difficult to realize that he was still living. There was also another trace of a thought, the thought that it seemed that the pattern of this world was so framed that, once two lives crossed the paths of each other in deep emotion, they came together again and again inevitably.

It was only a momentary pause. He said: "You are welcome, Nun."

"This," Nun said, turning to the young man, "is my son, Joshua. He is vowed to your service, Moses."

"He is, in spite of his youth, one of the foremost of the leaders among my young men," Aaron added.

"Joshua is welcome, too," Moses said. And then he turned to Aaron, his impatience boiling over. "What of the Hebrews?" he demanded. "Are they ready?"

Aaron glanced at him edgewise. "It is a long story," he suggested. "I would like to explain it all carefully—and our journey has been tiring."

Moses paused. It seemed to him that he had asked a simple question which could be answered simply. But he had not been a desert chieftain for seventeen years without learning that men differ and that, if you want to lead them, you must sometimes let them go their own gait.

"Very well," he said, curbing his impatience. "After the evening meal we can talk."

They sat in a circle round the fire. Through the palms above them the stars were winking diamond points and below them the lake shimmered darkly and from around them they could hear the sounds of the thousands of tribesmen whom Moses had led up with him. It was a setting which suggested quietness and peace and beauty. But humanity will not let itself be quiet and peaceful.

"Only the Kenites use the bow and arrow," Moses was explaining. "To that extent the Egyptians have the advantage of us. But they can all fight. Let them at any army in the open field and the very fury of their charge will sweep more disciplined troops away. Against walls of brick and stone, however, they are helpless. I had trouble enough, even though we were twenty to one, to capture the fort of the Egyptians in Sinai. Desert dwellers are not meant for sieges. That is why, as I explained through Elihun, I need the Hebrews to rise and to attack the Wall of the Princes from the rear. When the Egyptians

are caught unexpectedly between two assaults, then my tribesmen will break through. But the two attacks must be carefully co-ordinated. That was why I sent word to you that I must see you first. Aaron, are the Hebrews ready?"

Aaron did not look at him. He shook his head slowly. Moses sat upright.

"But they were to be ready," he exclaimed. "I sent you word only six weeks ago. 'So soon as Merneptah has reached Canaan and is involved there, I will lead my tribesmen up against the Wall of the Princes!' That is what I wrote. And now Merneptah is deep in Canaan. Nor can I hold my tribesmen here too long. You do not know the men of the desert, Aaron. They are like hawks, quick to swoop. They veer away just as quickly. Unless I attack within a week they will grow restless and start to melt away. How soon will the Hebrews be ready, Aaron?"

Aaron reached forward and pushed the unburnt end of a stick into the fire with his fingers, not wanting to look his brother in the face.

"When you are through the Wall of the Princes," he answered.

"When I am through the Wall of the Princes!" Moses got to his feet swiftly. He stared down at Aaron with knotted brows. "You don't understand," he said. "That is not the plan. I have already told you that my tribesmen need help to break through the forts. Once let us through and Egypt will fall like a fatted ox. But the Hebrews must rise and attack from the rear. You will have to go back and tell them so. Start tonight. Tell them to rise."

Aaron did not dare to say that it was by his advice that the Hebrew elders, knowing that their people lacked arms and discipline, had decided to wait until the result of Moses' attack was perceived before they rose in revolt. When the word of Moses' intention to attack had come six weeks ago, Aaron, thinking it over, had felt that to risk all on a single throw of the knucklebones was folly. What did they know, he had said privately to Hur and Elkanah and others, of the fighting qualities of the desert tribesmen? Suppose they were beaten back? Then the lives of the Hebrews would have been wasted for nothing, and manifold torments would be inflicted upon them, also for nothing.

It was these considerations—as well as the thought of what his own position would be if an abortive revolt were started—which had suggested Aaron's plan. This plan was to let the desert fighters attempt their assault whilst the Hebrews sat back and waited. If the tribesmen succeeded—good. If they failed, as he had explained painstakingly to the Hebrew elders, the

Hebrews would be no worse off than before. It was true that, now that he had met his brother and had seen what he was like and had had a glimpse of the tough desert warriors, he rather wished for a moment that he had adopted the dangerous road, since it actually might have led to success. He still felt, however, that his own plan was the wiser plan, the safer plan—for the Hebrews—and for himself. Surely these desert warriors did not need the help of the Hebrews—although, glancing up covertly at his brother's face, he hoped that neither Nun nor Joshua would reveal to Moses what he had advised.

"Well," Moses demanded. "When will you start?"

"The Hebrews cannot rise," Aaron stated, his lips thrust out obstinately. "They have no arms, no skill in war. How can they rise?"

"They are men, aren't they? Men who have been beaten with rods, who have seen their wives raped and their daughters violated? By Yahweh, were I one of them, I would rise up, had I only my naked hands."

"My band of young men will follow me," Joshua exclaimed, leaping to his feet. He faced Moses across the fire, his eyes flashing. "Whenever you say we will attack the Wall."

"He has only a hundred men," Aaron stated dryly. "There are thousands of Egyptian soldiers along the Wall. It would be useless."

"What do they expect, these Hebrews?" Moses cried, still speaking to Aaron. "They ask my tribesmen to break the Wall. Then, you say, they will rise. They expect others to fight for them but will not fight themselves. By the God of Sinai, they are not men."

"You forget that they are slaves," Nun remarked, quietly, from where he was sitting.

"Are not slaves, too, men?"

"These men and women have been slaves for over forty years."

"What has forty years to do with manhood?"

"In forty years men become accustomed to slavery," Nun pointed out, appreciating the frustrated anger within Moses, even though the sight of that anger made him realize his own age. At the same time he had no intention of giving Aaron away, since if, as he had come again to believe, Moses had some important part in the great Design of the universe, it was obviously foolish to try to interfere with that Design. "I myself should know," he went on quietly, "I, who was once a physician in Memphis and have now been a slave for over forty years. In the first years you rebel. Your pride refuses to bend. Even when you come to comprehend that physical resistance is useless since

it only brings worse punishments, you still rebel in your mind. And then, one morning you wake up and realize with a shock that even the rebellion of the mind has passed away. You shrug your shoulders. You bend to your task. You take what comes to you and obey. You have no spirit left.

"That is part. But there is more than that, Moses. Most of the Hebrews who now dwell in Goshen were either born in slavery or were so young when the oppression came that they have no real memory of any other life. The life of slavery is normal to them. It is written on the pages of their minds. Take any people and write slavery on their minds, or anything else you will, and until you can burn that writing off, you can expect from them only the thoughts of slaves and the action of slaves. The Hebrews are accustomed to slavery, Moses. It is not their fault. But can you expect slaves to risk almost certain death for a freedom they have never known? How can you expect slaves with slave minds to fight? They must be purged of their slave minds first. Their salvation must come from within themselves."

Moses had heard little or nothing of what Nun had said. While the old man had been talking, his mind had been darting this way and that, trying to see some solution. He turned to Aaron.

"If you take word to them from me?" he blurted out. "If you explain the thousands of fighting men ready here? Will they not rise then?"

"I doubt it," Aaron said. "Nun is right. They have the minds of slaves. But," he glanced up shrewdly, "why not attack the Wall of the Princes in any case? Merneptah is away. If you were to break through——"

He left the thought dangling. Moses turned abruptly and paced away. It was true that Merneptah was away in Canaan. It was true that such a chance might never come again. He remembered that between the forts the line was said to be thinly held. One might break through there. If one were to break through, with Egypt, stripped of its army . . .

Yet, on the other hand, he knew, as a general, that to break through and leave the Egyptians still holding the forts on either side would be to risk an attack from both flanks on his tribesmen while they were disorganized. Nor were the tribesmen equipped to attack forts or, for that matter, even a wall of brick. They had no siege engines. Their armour was light. Most of them carried only shields and javelins and axes or rude maces. Moses could visualize what the dreaded Egyptian archers would do to them, and what further disaster would overtake them if they were repulsed and the Egyptian chariots let loose on them

whilst they were in retreat. No, it would not be wise to make the attempt.

He had reached the beach. He glanced casually along the palms where for hundreds of yards the fires showed the bivouacs of his men. He looked out over the lake. Its levels were dark and mysterious, as mysterious as the purpose of the God of Sinai, save where, here and there, ripples of phosphorescence ran like swift, evanescent curls of flame. A savage fury boiled up in him. Was this to be the issue of the plan which, as he believed, had been put into his mind by the God of Sinai Himself? Was he, who had raised the tribesmen by the force of his idea throughout the length and breadth of the peninsula and beyond, as a man calls a flock around him and drives it forward, to return now without attempting anything, like a beaten cur? Jethro might not say anything. But what would the tribes say? What would happen to the reputation he had built for himself throughout the desert, the influence he had gained?

Moses knew. It would dissolve like the hoar frost when the desert sun rises. He had thought that he had bound the tribes with the rope of his idea. Now, the rope was but a rope of sand. He would be pointed at, mocked, and all that he had gained in seventeen years of striving would disappear within a day. Could he endure that? Could this be the purpose of the God of Sinai? No, it could not be. It could not.

He turned to the direction in which Sinai lay. He stretched out his hands, palms upwards. He looked up at the stars. He prayed to the God of Sinai. He begged for some sign, for some word within his mind. No word came. The treacherous thought crossed his mind as he dropped his hands that they were by now far away from the Holy Mount so that the power of the God of Sinai was weakened by distance when matched against the power of the gods of Egypt.

He thrust the thought away. He tried to recall that night, so long ago, when he had lain on the ground before the Holy Mount and had heard God speak to him. Had not the God of Sinai promised then that, at some time when he had been made ready for the task he should return to Egypt and take his vengeance and succour these Hebrews, even if they were not worth the succour? Had not his God helped him so far at every step of the way? He turned and stared in the direction of the Wall of the Princes. Who else but God had caused Canaan to revolt and Merneptah to go forth? Might it not have been God's purpose from the beginning that, somehow, miraculously, the tribesmen should of themselves break through the Wall of the Princes? That would be the greater miracle. Were not all things

possible to God? Why should he ask for a further sign beyond that which had already been given him? One must have faith. Perhaps, within a day or two, Elihun would come with news of the defeat of Merneptah in Canaan. With God all things were possible. The God of Sinai had brought him to the borders of Egypt. By the God of Sinai, he would not return, a whipped cur, his influence among the tribes melting from him, until he had made some great, some tremendous attempt. The God of Sinai would show him the way!

He turned and strode back to the fire. "I will attack," he said.

CHAPTER X

It was the hour before dawn, two days later. In the uncertain shifting light one could see the forts of the Wall of the Princes rearing themselves up in the ghostly light like grim, prehistoric monsters. In the inexplicable way of minds, the sight carried Moses in one huge leap back to another hour such as this, an hour when he had stood triumphant, a Prince of Egypt, on the deck of his ship, returning from the conquest of Kush, and Tharbis had been beside him—Tharbis smelling sweetly of perfume, Tharbis with whom he had laid during the night just past, her body pressing in against him, Tharbis with all the tragic splendour of his wild, deep love for her wrapped around her. It was so vivid a memory that he blinked and took time to wonder if the far distant past is really past or whether it lurks close to a man, rubbing elbows with him.

He dismissed the thought. He glanced round him, once more the general. In the ridges between the dunes in which they lay the tribesmen were indiscernible. Even the trained eye which knew where they were could only make them out with an effort and say, This is not a hump, that is not a mound of sand, it is a man. They were waiting, those tribesmen. They bore rude scaling ladders, made from the palms. Ordinarily to cut down palm trees, which were food and life, was an act unhallowed, one forbidden by custom. But it was the God of Sinai who had commanded it, or so Moses believed. And the God of Sinai had brought them this far without detection. In a moment he would put the God of Sinai to a further test.

Briefly, in this moment, he weighed his plan again. It was simple and in its simplicity he hoped for success. To attack the whole Wall would have been impossible. It was equally impossible, he had decided reluctantly, to break through a

section of it and leave the forts untouched. So he had determined to assault the very southernmost section of the Wall, including the fort which was based on the head of the lake, and the section between it and the next fort, and that second fort itself. In this way, if he were successful he would turn the flank of the Wall and, holding this section of it, pour part of his tribesmen through to Goshen. Then, the Hebrews would rise. And then he would leap upon undefended Egypt.

This was his plan. He glanced along the silent line of tribesmen once more. Each company had its appointed task. He felt his limbs quivering as they had never quivered before.

"Sound the signal," he whispered savagely to the man beside him.

The ram's horn brayed. As if it were some magic trumpet the silent dunes sprang into life. With wild yells the tribesmen rose up and rushed forward. Moses waited. Around him a picked group of Kenite archers had risen up. Along with Moses they watched one force rush against the southern fort and another to the north against the second fort. It was not the immediate purpose to take these forts. These groups were but to keep the garrisons in play and Moses' eyes came back to the section of the Wall between. He did not realize that he was holding his breath. But he was. The first wave of tribesmen reached it. They set their ladders against it. They started to clamber up. Then, and not till then, the forms of its defenders started to appear. Moses could imagine how they felt, just wakened from sleep, cursing the sentries who had not seen the approach, their courage and morale at its lowest ebb.

"Shoot," he said savagely, raising his own bow. Around him rose the twang of strings and the hiss of arrows. For a few moments they shot thick and fast, dropping the defenders and clearing the Wall for their own people to set foot on it. Then, as the tribesmen reached the top, they stopped their shooting.

"Forward!" Moses cried, his axe in his hand, he knew not how. He reached the scaling ladder. He clambered up it, his Kenites behind him. He saw a Sherden swordsman above him, towering monstrously huge in the grey light, his great sword raised. There was no time for courtesy. The sweep of Moses' axe, aimed in a low arc, caught him in the ankle and shore it through, and at the same moment he was conscious of a spearsman about to strike him, off balance. Even as the spear thrust forward, a javelin pierced the man. It was Joshua on the ladder behind him.

Moses was on the wall and others with him. There were a few instants of fierce fighting. It came to him as a surprise that the

Wall had been cleared. Egyptians, however, were still swarming up the stairways on the inner side. Moses shouted greatly to his tribesmen and leaped into the press in the stairway before him. The tribesmen behind him bore him forward. He was carried out of himself. In this moment all was forgotten except that last, that final thrill of physical, hand-to-hand combat which in some way, despite its brutality, is the uttermost exaltation, the primordial, hysterical outburst of the savage animal in man and he finds it good, more drunken than the drunkenness of strong drink, more compelling in the forgetfulness it brings than the spasm of sexual orgasm. With the feeling that hours must have passed Moses checked his axe, perceiving that there were no more Egyptians to slay and looked around him. It was then that he realized that not more than a half hour could have elapsed since first he had leaped upon the Wall. For the sun was not yet up. His swift glance swept the Wall. He could not forbear a shout. Between the two fortresses the Wall of the Princes was his. Before him lay Egypt, prostrate, if he could but make good what he had won. The groans of the dying and the shrieks of the wounded and a man running about aimlessly in a circle a short way from him trying to hold in with both hands entrails that dropped loose ends on the ground as he stumbled—these did not penetrate his mind. The God of Sinai, he thought triumphantly, had blessed him.

But then, abruptly, he became the general again. With great strides he dashed back up the staircase to the top of the wall. One look told him that the forces attacking the forts themselves were making no headway. The walls were too high. The arrows were beating them down. Even as he looked a flight of arrows from the southern fort hissed among those tribesmen who had conquered the Wall. Moses turned to find his trumpeter to bid him sound the signal. The man was not there. He looked and saw him lying half on the wall, half off it, his legs dangling down from it where a Sherden sword had spread-eagled him. There was no time to think of it. Moses seized the ram's horn and blew three powerful blasts, calling off the groups attacking the forts. He waited a moment to make sure they obeyed. Then, leaping down to the inner side of the wall, the Egyptian side, he started to organize for the second part of the assault.

Once again his intention was simple. From the exterior side the forts were impregnable to the desert dwellers. Their battlements were too high, the arrows from them too deadly. But, on the inner side, facing Egypt, so Moses had remembered as he had planned his assault, they were not built with such care. Although each fort had been designed to be complete in itself,

with its own storehouses of food and arrows and its own armouries of weapons, nevertheless outbuildings had been put up, lean-tos for this and that, more comfortable sleeping quarters, barracks for extra troops, dwelling places for the camp women. Through this rabbit warren the forts could be penetrated. The essence was haste before the news of the assault could reach Avaris and reinforcements could arrive.

To organize the tribesmen, however, particularly under the rain of arrows which now started to pour from both forts, took time. Moses cursed their lack of discipline even though he knew it was inevitable. At last, two hours after the sun was up, with almost all his forces on the Egyptian side of the wall, he was ready. To the north, out of range of the arrows, a company watched to repel any attempt from the rest of the Wall or from Avaris to reinforce the forts. Opposite the two forts, the rest were drawn up, also out of range of the arrows, their scaling ladders ready, the beams which they would use as battering-rams prepared. Moses gave the signal. With a shout the tribesmen rushed—and the arrows drove into them like sleet while behind them, in two groups, one to each fort, the Kenites advanced to pour in their arrows in reply.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon. The outbuildings in both forts had fallen. In the southern fort, where Moses led, the tribesmen had gained a lodgement. But in the northern fort every attack upon the real defences had been repelled. Meanwhile the tribesmen had suffered heavily, so heavily that in the southern fort the fighting had reached a pause, as a wounded beast which has dragged itself part way over a ridge stops to pant heavily, its tongue lolling out, its eyes starting from its skull, before it makes the next attempt. And there was sullenness amongst the tribesmen. Moses could feel it. He made his way back to his Kenites. He looked up at the sun. He stared towards Avaris, from the garrison of which any real aid to the forts must come. He came to a decision and turned around looking for a messenger. It was then that he realized that Joshua, who had followed him wherever he went that day, was still with him, gazing at him with those worshipping eyes of his.

"Go," Moses said hoarsely. "Order the groups without the Wall to come in. Bring down that force which waits to check reinforcements from the north. Have them all hasten to me. By the God of Sinai, we will take this fort before us here or die where we attack."

"Yes, master," Joshua said. Moses watched him go. He knew that this was to leave his army without eyes. But he

also knew his tribesmen. Unless they took one of the two forts soon, they would abandon the attempt. At the worst they would retreat sullenly, refusing further conflict, giving up what they had won. At the best they would leave the forts and sweep on into Egypt, careless of the danger left behind them, and reckless of all discipline. The decision he had just made, Moses reflected grimly, was one of those which if it turns out well is praised as a stroke of genius and if it fails is cursed as folly and stupidity. He had made one such decision, years ago, before Napata, the capital city of Kush. It had turned out well. Pray to the God of Sinai this also might turn out well.

Thus he thought, watching the company to the north start towards him and the heads of the groups outside the Wall come over it. When they were all assembled he said to his Kenites:

"Cease your fire. We will fling you, too, into the cauldron."

Something in his spirit struck fire from them all. They raised a shout. They followed him as he charged towards the fort. It was an hour later that, at last, they burst through into the inner defences. Once admitted the tribesmen were a torrent of death. Within a few moments there was not an Egyptian living. Moses turned to them while their spirit was hot.

"Now to the northern fort," he shouted. "We will serve it as we have served this."

They started to pour out, shouting. Moses pondered swiftly whether he would stop to reorganize and decided against it. Be bold, and before night came he would be ready to sweep into Goshen. Egypt would be his. With a last glance around the conquered fort he started to follow his men out. It was at this moment that he heard a second shout, a shout of a different character, one which had panic and dismay in it. He rushed out. One look told him. There, already close to the northern fort and driving fast, was a force of chariotry, their horses galloping, the white plumes tossing.

It was disaster. Moses knew it. Even as he realized it, he saw the tribesmen who had been attacking the northern fort pour out from it like ants and start to run for the part of the Wall nearest them. Those of his Kenites who were up there by the northern fort fired a few arrows and started to run also. The chariotry caught them all—and at the same moment out from the fort which they had ceased attacking came disciplined Egyptian soldiers sweeping in serried order to cut them off.

It was happening as quickly as, early in the morning, the capture of the section of the Wall had taken place. Moses had no time to reflect that the God of Sinai had failed him. He must save what he could. He shouted to his men in a great voice,

ordering them back into the fort. He ran amongst them, belabouring them, cursing them, getting them back, not conscious that in the confusion Joshua was one of the few helping him. Hastily, too, he drew up the rest of the Kenite archers along the battlements. He had barely time to get some semblance of order before a section of the chariots was sweeping down. But he had been just in time. Most of his tribesmen were either in the fort or on the Wall. There, the chariots could not touch them, and spears and arrows, as the tribesmen had themselves earlier discovered, were futile against brick and stone. Moses glanced at the sun. It was still an hour up from the low horizon. He knew what the Egyptians would do. Horses and chariots might be futile. But the men could be dismounted and joined to the infantry from the fort to the north and to other infantry which would come up. Once again he faced a choice—to hold on to this which he had won and risk being surrounded in the hope that the news of what he had accomplished might come to the Hebrews, or to abandon the fort at once and flee back across the sand. Even as he recognized this, he saw the chariotry dismounting and saw infantry moving down on the outer, the desert side of the Wall.

This general of the Egyptians doesn't waste much time, he thought unwillingly. He turned to look inward. He saw him. He had drawn up his chariot just within a bow's shot from the fort. He stood there in it, resplendent, indolently assured, holding the reins lightly in his hand. His voice carried across the distance and it, too, was insolent:

"Ho, barbarians, surrender. I will give you the Pharaoh's grace."

It was Sinuhe. That was the first staggering realization which came to him. Sinuhe, who had been his friend. The second was that he was beaten, completely beaten—he must retreat while he could, he saw that now—and Sinuhe had beaten him. He, a barbarian who had thought to invade Egypt, and Sinuhe—Sinuhe, who had been his friend. How amused Sinuhe would be if he came to know of it. Well, Sinuhe would never know. Seizing his bow he raised it. Anger and the raw wounds of pride and disappointment sped the shaft. It pierced Sinuhe's throat as once, from that same bow, an arrow had pierced the throat of Barak. As he saw the confusion among the Egyptians at the shot, Moses shouted savagely to his tribesmen to retreat.

They were back in their camp under the palms, what was left of them. Closer to a third than a quarter of them had been lost. There were comparatively few wounded and of these the hurts were slight, since those who had been seriously wounded had, perforce, been left to the Egyptians. The chieftains stood about

Moses. They were silent. Their silence was of no comfort to him. He knew what was in their minds: "Fool! Madman! Where are our men? What will you say to their women? As for us we will follow you no longer."

That was what they were saying in their minds and what they would soon be flinging in his face. Moses cast about for something to say to them. He could think of nothing. He said stammeringly:

"Perhaps Merneptah has been beaten in Canaan. Perhaps, if we wait here——"

The chieftain of the Amalekites spat deliberately on the ground right between his feet, stopping him. The chieftain of the Midianites said:

"Stay here? Do you think we will listen longer to the words of a murderer?"

"But if it had succeeded——"

"Succeed! It never had a chance," the chieftain of the Edomites sneered. "Only a fool would think it had a chance."

Moses wanted to say that but for one brief accident of the wheel of events they would tonight be standing as victors along the Wall of the Princes. But when he tried to speak he could not. His throat closed up. He tried to clear it. A man broke through the circle of the chieftains.

"Elihun is here!" he cried. "Elihun from Canaan."

There was a sudden burst of hope within Moses. Perhaps, this was the miracle from the God of Sinai. If Merneptah was defeated or, perhaps, dead . . . Yes, that must be it. The God of Sinai! He found that he could speak:

"Bring him here," he stammered. "At once." And as Elihun came through the circle he spoke to him eagerly. "What is it, Elihun? Tell your news."

The dark-browed Canaanite looked at him directly.

"Gezer has been taken," he said. "Yenoam is in flames. Israel is desolate. Her seed is not. Wherever Merneptah has gone, he has triumphed. In all Canaan there is none to say him nay."

Moses could feel the eyes upon him. The God of Sinai, he thought dully. But he had nothing to say, nor, if he had, could his lips have framed the words. Gathering up his skirts he flung them over his head. And so, turning, he walked out from the circle.

CHAPTER XI

It was once more, the hour before the dawn. Moses stood this time, not before the Wall of the Princes, but at the foot of the Holy Mount. He stared up at it. In his mind were the weeks since that humiliating, that shattering night of defeat. The tribesmen had melted away from him, scorning him as they left. Aaron had returned to Egypt, taking Nun and Joshua with him. True, neither Nun nor Joshua had faltered. But in Aaron's bearing had been a tacit implication that he had come on a footless errand and that, from its inception, Moses' plan had been a fool's imagining.

Moses had not protested. He had led the Kenites, who still acknowledged his leadership, albeit grumblingly and with murmurs, back to Sinai. With bowed head he had listened to Jethro's reproaches, which were all the more biting because the old man was visibly trying to restrain himself and be just. He had taken the curses of the women who followed him about, crying out at him, demanding back their husbands and their sons, spitting at him in their agony and fury. And then he had shut himself up in his tent. Zipporah had tried to comfort him. He would have none of her pathetic offerings, not caring that she, who loved him as the whole centre and meaning of her life, was annihilated by his suffering; and, in the way of women who love, would have done anything possible to alleviate it. Gershom, his elder son, by now fourteen, could not understand his father. Nor could Eliezer, who at eight was bright and knowing.

But Moses did not care that Gershom looked at him in bewilderment or that Eliezer kept asking his mother in his clear childish treble what was wrong with Father or that Zipporah's eyes were big and wistful and full of pain. He sat in gloom and brooded. Had he mistaken the will and purpose of the God of Sinai? Or had he, somehow, departed from that will? Or, worst of all, had he deceived himself and was the God of Sinai, in whom he had believed so long and so fervently, but another illusion, a shadow of his own conjuring? Was that mighty mission and purpose which had, for almost a score of years, absorbed and obsessed him, but a mirage flung before him mockingly to lead him to disaster?

These were the questions which had at last driven him around to the back side of the Holy Mount with a confused determination in his mind to settle them once and for all. He stared up at it. In the grey light the rugged mass looked cold, forbidding. One

could not see its peak. It was wreathed in mist and cloud. Did a God really dwell up there? He wondered. Was there some terrible Presence up there, waiting; or when he got to the top, would he find nothing—just that—nothing? As when he had plumbed the depths of Tharbis, whom he had loved, in whose love he had believed—in her he had also found nothing.

Well, there was one way to find out. He shrugged his shoulders. He walked on a little farther. He came to a place where a face of the mountain was split from foot to top by an upward-running gully. The light was dim. He started up, the sound of water dripping from the rock around him, the scent of caper and thyme and hyssop in his nostrils. He scarcely noticed when he had reached the top of that gully and had found another. Nor did it interest him when the water changed to snow and the sun came up and the mists began to clear away. After a while there were dizzy precipices and towering gulfs beneath him. The ascent became steeper. He toiled upward, like an ant making its way up a giant's staircase, his fingers numbed and bleeding, not looking down. He came out on a little plateau, ringed almost around with grey, granite cliffs. One of them was the final peak, the last ascent. A cloud still hovered on it. For a moment, staring up at it, he knew a sense of terror. If God really dwelt up there, would he not be struck down terribly? Something of the superstitious awe which the tribesmen felt and which, until his day of defeat, had possessed Moses himself, seized on him. How could a man dare to violate the very dwelling place of God? He found himself suddenly shivering as with the ague. His terror mounted suddenly. He thought he felt a chill breath, that breath which had enveloped him on that night so long ago when he had walked out in the darkness to the base of the Holy Mount and had felt God around him. He made to turn back.

He could not turn back. He must know, even if it meant death. He flung himself at the final ascent. He clawed his way up it, panting. Just as he reached the top the mist cleared away. He clambered over the last jagged rock and stood upright. He was on the peak of the Holy Mount. And what was there? Nothing. Nothing but a small, flat space of greyish granite, still wet and slippery from the cloud. He laughed aloud. This was what he had been afraid of. This was what he had worshipped. This was where he had thought God dwelt. And what was it? Set it on the plain and one would know it for what it was, a shelf of granite. That was all! God? Where was God? He looked around. He took a step or two forward. On every side the mountain dropped in sheer rugged lines. In every direction was majesty, a sea of mountains, as if some tumultuous ocean, running wild,

had abruptly been solidified into stone, and between them the valleys were made small by height and distance and to his right he could see the blue sea glittering in the sun and across it the rugged peaks of Africa. On the other side was the gulf beyond which was the desert and the dwellings of the Midianites.

It was a view worthy of a God. Yes, on such a mount God might dwell. But what did that matter if no God dwelt here? Moses sat down. He spat—contemptuously. He laughed again. So this was the God of Sinai. Down there was the plain of Sinai. He could see it. He could even guess at the black dots of the tents. From down there Jethro and the Kenites looked up at the peak of this holy Mount, fearfully, superstitiously, and made the sign of worship, believing that God Himself watched them from that awful peak, noting all they did, ready to visit them with terrible punishment if they sinned against what they believed to be His commands. And who sat here? Moses! And Moses spat.

It was some time later that he began to descend. His descent was slower than his journey up had been. On his journey up, fierce determination had driven him forward and a compelling need to know if there was a God of Sinai or not, and deep-seated shreds of belief. Now he was scornful. Now, he sneered at himself as a man who has believed utterly in the promises of a woman sneers when he finds them false. His eyes were opened. He took a drink of water from a spring here. He stopped to observe a curious rock there. He noticed that the day which had begun with so clear a sun had changed and that heavy banks of clouds had drifted in from the Narrow Sea. As a result it was already late afternoon when he reached the lower levels of the mountain and stopped for a moment to gaze up at it. The sullen clouds veiled the peaks. But as he looked, through a break in the clouds the slanting rays of the low sun illumined it. The cloud gleamed rosy-pink. The slopes beneath it were stained to gold for a moment. Almost one could believe that a Presence stirred in that quivering cloud, high up above him. But he knew. He had been there. There was no God. There was no Purpose. Let Merneptah triumph as undoubtedly he was triumphing now, the sound of singing and of cymbals about him, the flowers flung in his path, Pharaoh of Egypt returning home in exultation from the sack of Canaan. Let the Hebrews labour. Let them sweat under their burdens. Let the whips fall and the women be flung to the ground and the men be pushed down on the stakes of impalement. Who cared? Who was there to help them? No one. And let Merneptah triumph and laugh at Moses, if he thought of him. Thus went the world and there was no God to right the balance.

The sun was hidden again. The rosy glow had departed. There was once again only a sullen bank of clouds. Moses continued on his way, his heart sneering within him, trying to decide what he would do. The purpose by which his life had been guided for a score of years was gone. There was no meaning left in life. It was an idiot's dream, that was all. But one had to live. One had to go on from day to day. Well, he would go on. The power he had lost could be recaptured. He would do that. But he would be cynical this time, cynical and ruthless. Forget the Hebrews. Play for himself alone. Recapture Amalek and Midian and Edom. Compel the Kenites to his will. Be ruthless.

These were his thoughts as he came to the base of the mountain and reached a point where a smaller gully met the one down which he was travelling. He never knew what made him pause. But, as he stopped, a chill wind seemed to blow around him. He shivered. He glanced up at the peak. The clouds were dead and heavy. He shrugged his shoulders and turned to go on. A movement up the smaller gully prevented him. He looked. Down it a whirling pillar of dust was advancing, raised by the conflicting currents of air. It was a common enough sight on the lower levels of Sinai. He watched it, noting how slow its progress was and wondering a little at the absolute stillness of the air about himself. There was a thorn tree in the mouth of the gully, quite close to where he stood.

For no particular reason Moses decided that he would wait until the pillar reached that thorn tree. But, just as the pillar came to the thorn tree, the sun broke out again from behind the clouds. Its long slanting rays caught the pillar. For a long instant it stood there, embracing the thorn tree, the slanting rays shooting through the whirling motes of dust and, by some trick of light, every branch, every spike, seemed to light up miraculously as if ablaze with fire. The illusion was perfect. You could almost hear the thorn tree crackle. Moses stared and rubbed his eyes and stared again. But still the pillar hung there and the thorn tree seemed to blaze brighter and brighter. Around him suddenly was a stillness, an absolute stillness which could be felt. Terror seized him as he stared. He forgot that this was but a trick of light. No, it was more than a trick of light. How else could that pillar stand there, whirling? How else could that bush blaze with strange, with other-worldly fire? Was it not on fire and yet remained unconsumed? He took a step forward and then another, falteringly, as a man who is hypnotized. And then, abruptly, he seemed to feel the Presence gather thick around him and he stopped where he was, and suddenly, a still, small voice seemed to say:

"Draw not nigh. But take off thy sandals, O Son of Amram. For the ground on which thou standest is holy ground."

He took off his sandals. He fell on his face on the ground, trembling, thinking with the back of his mind that he had mocked God and that God would be terrible. How could a man mock God and live? God, he thought confusedly, had been away from Sinai, on a journey, mayhap. But God had come back. Yes, He had come back. He pressed his forehead hard against the rough earth, grovelling before the Power, praying incoherently to be forgiven.

"Why art thou here, O Son of Amram?" the Voice said within his brain, coldly.

He paused, trying to think how best to excuse himself. But at that the Presence around him seemed to grow so deadly still, like a snake ready to strike, that he was afraid. He no longer paused. He poured it out—the promise he had thought made to him, the years of planning, the march up to Egypt—and then, the unexpected, the unbelievable disaster.

"So my plan has come to naught," he cried out passionately within himself. "Men scorn me. Women spit at me. And Merneptah triumphs. Yea, Lord, at this very moment, Merneptah triumphs. Yet it was Thy plan."

"Art thou so sure it was My plan?"

"How could it be otherwise? At least——"

"Didst thou ever think that it might be thine own plan, not Mine, conceived in pride and brought forth in egotism?"

"But, Lord——"

"Was it uppermost in thy mind to succour the Hebrews, who are to be My people, or to take vengeance on Egypt and Merneptah for the time when thou wast driven forth; or"—the Voice paused and became very terrible—"for vengeance on Tharbis, for vengeance on her and lust for her? Answer me that, O Son of Amram."

He could not answer. For it was true. Yes, at this moment, he realized that it was true.

"Thou seest," the Voice went on. "It was thine own plan. Therefore, did it fail. And didst thou not mock me on the mountain top? Didst thou not say that there was no God of Sinai?"

There was nothing that he could answer. He felt the anger of the Lord grow about him. He grovelled on the ground, praying, humbling himself. The anger lessened. He thought he heard the Voice say:

"But now, wilt thou follow My plan, O Moses, whom I have schooled with adversity?"

"Aye, Lord," he cried out in his heart. "Aye, Lord."

"Wilt thou forget thy venegance on Merneptah? And wilt thou"—the Voice paused again—"wilt thou forget Tharbis? For thy purpose must be single."

It was difficult. For even at this moment he found it almost beyond him to give up his hopes of, at some time, taking vengeance on Merneptah and on Tharbis—most of all, on Tharbis. For seventeen years she had festered in his heart. But he felt the anger of the Lord mount swiftly and he agreed in his mind hastily:

"Yes, Lord, I will forget my vengeance."

"Then, hear thou My Purpose. Thou shalt lead the Hebrews out of bondage. For they are My people and from a long way back have I chosen them."

"But how, Lord? For the Egyptians hold them in bondage. And the assault on Egypt hath failed."

"Can a man or a people be saved, O Moses, except from within themselves?"

Moses saw what was meant. It did not seem strange that the God of Sinai should seem to say almost exactly what Nun, the physician, had said, there, around the campfire. He did not think of this. What puzzled him was how this was to be done. He asked. The Voice said:

"Go thou to Pharaoh. Tell him to let My people go."

To go alone! It was foolish, desperate. He cried out: "But how shall I persuade the Pharaoh? For, lo, I am not subtle of speech. Nor have I eloquence with words."

"Aaron, thy brother, is eloquent," the Voice answered inexorably. "He shall speak for thee."

"Yet, even so, the Pharaoh will not hearken."

"I Myself will bring troubles upon the Pharaoh. Yea, let him harden his heart if he will. Already Egypt is swimming in a tempestuous sea. I will overwhelm his ship."

"But the Hebrews do not know Thee," Moses argued. "They worship Baal and Jacob-el and the Goat of Mendes and other gods. How shall I persuade them to follow me out of Egypt? And where shall I lead them?"

"Am I not the God of the wilderness? And doth not the wilderness purify a people which is corrupt?"

"But how shall I persuade them to worship Thee?"

"Am I not the God of their fathers?" the Voice inquired, in a cold still tone.

Moses felt afraid to argue further. He was silent. After a while the Voice continued:

"Lo, I am the God whom thy father, Amram, worshipped, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. Tell

that to My people who have forgotten Me. That is thy task, O Moses. For I, the Lord God of their fathers, shall lead them out of Egypt. Aye, tell them that I shall lead them up to Canaan into a land flowing with milk and honey and make it theirs forever, because they are My people. Thus will they follow thee. And art thou not a magician also? Didst thou not learn how to produce illusion whilst thou wast at On in Egypt?"

It did come to Moses' mind that it was subtle to promise the Hebrews that they would be led out to a land flowing with milk and honey when, in reality, they were going to be shepherded into the wilderness, the wilderness where only the toughest can survive. But he was afraid to mention this. Another thought occurred to him. He had assumed that Yahweh and the God of Sinai were the same. But it would be better to be sure. He said humbly:

"But thy holy Name, O Lord God of Our Fathers? For, lo, when I come to the Hebrews and say to them: 'The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you!' They will say: 'What is His name?' And what shall I say unto them?"

And the Presence grew terrible so that for a moment it seemed to Moses that he would be annihilated utterly. And then the Voice seemed to thunder in his brain:

"I AM THAT I AM. Thus shalt thou speak to the Hebrews. I AM hath sent me unto you."

Moses was afraid to say anything more. He waited. But the Voice did not speak further. After a while he felt the Presence receding. And after a long while he dared, cautiously, to raise his head. The sun had set. There was no burning bush—only a thorn tree standing, bedraggled and pathetic, at the mouth of the desolate, shadowed gully. He got up carefully. He put on his sandals. He glanced up at Sinai. As he looked, amongst the dark lowering clouds at the summit there was a sudden jagged streak of lightning and the thunder crashed. He bowed to the ground. He felt himself trembling. In fear and trembling he turned and started to circle the mountain on his way back to the tents. As he moved on in the gathering dusk which made familiar things strange so that that lump of rock might be a lion and that shadow in the hollow an unknown monster, his fear began to pass. A deep exaltation began to fill him. He was no longer alone. No longer was he without a purpose. For the God of Sinai was with him.

Had Moses possessed Nun's analytical cast of mind he would have noticed that his recent experience had occurred like the previous one, after a period of intense humiliation and depression; and that what the Voice had said was a practical way of attempt-

ing to retrieve the defeat which he had suffered. But Moses was not so constituted. He belonged to those who can believe without effort and not ask how or why—those two sneering monosyllables which destroy faith, and the faithful when they hear them can do nothing but lose their tempers. So Moses as he strode along was soon drafting out what to do. Go back to Egypt. But forget, this time, about Merneptah—or, at least, since Merneptah was the Pharaoh, and a blow at Egypt would be a blow at him, forget about Tharbis.

Tharbis! He made a gesture with his hand as if he tossed away into the darkness some vile trash which, for some reason, he had cherished. He would forget her, he promised himself. He had given his word to Yahweh. No longer would she stand between him and the clarity, the singleness of purpose which Yahweh demanded; no longer would Yahweh, who in his belief was a pure God, be troubled by his lust for Tharbis. No, he would go back to Egypt, cleansed, purified. And alone this time. Get in touch with Aaron. Go out among the Hebrews. Preach to them of Yahweh, the God of their fathers. Prepare them within their own minds to throw off their bondage and to become a free people.

But be wise. Do not tell them that they would go forth into the wilderness, there to be toughened and purified. No, paint pictures of Canaan. Make it a paradise, an Eden. Write the desire for it on the pages of their minds. Break their slave mentality. Give them hope. For people, he perceived now, must be shepherded like sheep towards the goal you have willed for them. Yes, he would be wise this time, wise and cynical and clever. Deceive them for their own good. Was not that the purpose and the will of Yahweh, God of their fathers? Make them into a nation by giving the God of Sinai to them and them, in turn, to the God of Sinai. Swear a covenant between the Hebrews and the God of Sinai, a covenant such as already existed between the Kenites and Yahweh. Make it clear to them by symbols. Use his knowledge of the magic of illusions, those tricks and powers which, long ago, Ipuwer had taught him. Yes, that was something which, long unpractised, must be revived in his memory and used. Whilst doing this, watch Egypt. When Egypt was in turmoil, strike.

It did not occur to him that in his practical plans he was resurrecting in his mind all that he had unconsciously absorbed from watching the priests of Egypt at work, or becoming one himself with priests the world over. Moses was changing again from the forthright leader of men, the warrior in battle. He was becoming, without realizing it, the wise, the subtle, the secretive

Moses, who would be capable of leading the Hebrews out of Egypt and welding them into a nation. He felt that it was all God-inspired. He felt that I AM—strange that Ipuwer had said of his Supreme Power that He was not created but IS—had given him a command; and he had not the slightest wish to analyse how this feeling had come about. To him, the fact that he could believe in it and the further fact that it corresponded to his own desire and offered a chance of striking a blow at Egypt—and, as a sneaking thought told him, at Merneptah—and of rescuing the Hebrews, was enough. He came to the encampment. He burst into the tent of Jethro.

"Jethro," he burst out, "I go up to Egypt."

The old man—for he was really old now—looked up from his food, watching this impetuous, this unpredictable son-in-law of his.

"I shall lead the Hebrews out of Egypt," Moses rushed on. "By myself shall I lead them forth. Yahweh, the God of Sinai, hath promised me."

He was once more on the borders of Egypt. Around him and the horse on which he sat rolled the sand dunes of the desert, scarcely discernible under an ink-black sky. A part of his mind was impressed by the belief that this darkness was a sign from Yahweh so that he might the more easily slip across the borders of Egypt. But part of his mind was impressed once again, and more truthfully this time, that a cycle of his life was over and a new cycle beginning. Once he passed the border he would never return across it as a chieftain of the Kenites. He would either return leading a people out of bondage, or his bones would rot in the Egypt in which he had been born. There are few moments in life when men can clearly realize that the hour is fateful. Moses, however, knew that this was an hour heavy with fate.

On her donkey beside him Zipporah stirred. She knew that Moses had no thought for her or for what her feelings might be. But she was accustomed to that, having already perceived, not with reason but with intuition in these past years while her husband concentrated on Egypt and forgot her, that there was no meaning in life which, when all was said and done, was but the jumbled thought in a lunatic's brain but in which for some strange reason she kept on playing her part in a story which had no ordered sequence but jumped about madly hither and thither. She had not asked to love this man, but, by a curious freak of the lunatic maker of tales, she loved him with her whole soul and body, with the inner agony of her being, with the bruised anguish of her heart. He had no eyes for her now, and scarcely any for their son, Gershom, whom she had brought with her, hoping

against hope that the sight of him might make Moses hesitate in his crazy purpose. That had been futile. He was staring off towards Egypt. She gazed at him with deep, mournful eyes, trying to make out his form in the darkness, trying to impress this moment on her mind, knowing that she might never see him again. Behind her, she heard the group of tribesmen talking in low undertones. One of them coughed. Jethro said:

"It is time to go, Moses."

"Yes."

"I hope it may turn out well," Jethro went on dubiously. "Yet I doubt it. Remember, in Egypt, Yahweh will be far away from His dwelling place. His power will be weak."

"I shall return and tell you of it."

"I hope so. Yet the gods of Egypt are strong. I would that you would not go, Moses."

"Yahweh will go with me."

"Well, good-bye, Moses."

"Good-bye."

The moment had come. There was a sob in Zipporah's throat as she pressed her donkey up close to Moses.

"Good-bye, husband," she said, falteringly.

It was not the words but what was behind the words which caught Moses' attention. In one of the rare moments when he was really conscious of her, it came to him that, from that day when he had announced that he was returning to Egypt—alone—there had been no word of complaint from her, no protests, no womanly tears that she was being abandoned. He had a brief flash of perception as to how she loved him and, though no man or woman ever does more than appreciate the feelings of others, since one's own feelings are so much more important to oneself, he found it in his heart to pity her. He said:

"Look after our children, Zipporah."

The kindness in his voice drew one protest from her. "Must you go?"

"I must. But I will return, Zipporah. Yahweh hath promised it me."

"If I could but come with you."

"It would not be safe. Nor would it be safe for Gershom."

"I know. Look after that cold—your chest, Moses."

"I will."

"Promise you won't forget to rub it. You have the quail's fat?"

"Yes. Good-bye, Zipporah."

"Good-bye."

He rode off. They watched the outlines of him and his horse

begin to merge with the darkness and then disappear. To the tribesmen it was the departure of a man who, though one had to respect and obey him, had always been an alien and slightly mad. To Jethro, plucking at his beard in the darkness with trembling fingers, it was as if his son rode out of his life. He did not entirely approve of his son. There was, in Jethro's opinion, too much egotism in him and too little humility before Yahweh. In Jethro's opinion, one should not, as Moses seemed to him always to want to do, try to compel Yahweh. But they had been together for many years. They had talked for long hours in the silences of the night. In Moses, Jethro had found one with whom he could share his thoughts and reflections, one to whom he could talk of his youth, and to whom he could impart what he had learned in those days of the Canaanites and the Syrians, and the men of Ashur, and of Babylon and its code of laws. He could speculate with him on why the religions of the world were diverse and how this custom and that had come about, customs which, though actuated by the same impulse were so different; why the Phoenicians hurled their first-born children into the fire of Moloch and thought their screams were a song of praise to God; and why at Babylon, once in her life, every woman, no matter how well-born, must once in her lifetime, sit in the temple of Melitta until some stranger flung his coin in her lap and took her away and used her. And now Moses was departing and Jethro never expected to see him again.

Zipporah had the same expectation. The ache in her throat was intolerable. There, in the darkness went her life, a life which had never really begun.

"Time to go," Jethro said again.

The words were forced out of her. "Not yet."

"But it is time to go."

"Not yet. Please—not yet."

BOOK III
THE DELIVERER
(1220 B.C.)

MERNEPTAH IS PHARAOH

CHAPTER I

ON the wooden table a single rushlight fluttered. From behind it, Aaron at his side, Moses looked deliberately around at the men who were gathered in a group against the wall of the mud-brick hut. He could see their eyeballs gleaming in the flickering light. He could perceive the expectation, the mingled awe and hope in the faces turned towards himself. It filled him with a swelling sense of power and with a belief in himself and in his mission as a cup fills with wine.

There was a sense of drama within him as well. For three years, living on the edge of the desert which surrounded Goshen, since the land was like a wedge thrust out eastward from Egypt, he had taken the legend of himself which he had found ready for him and had raised it as a banner before the Hebrews. He did not appear before them too often. He let agents act for him and Aaron speak for him. When he did appear it was, as now, before the elders and leaders of the Hebrews with some vital, some decisive pronouncement, such as that for which these men waited. When he acted it was with crushing effect. There had been the affair of the troop of Egyptian soldiers who, falling drunk, had ravaged a village. Of that troop, within six hours, not a man had been left alive; nor had there been any reprisal since Merneptah had been occupied in Kush. There had also been the case of the Egyptian noble whose delectation it had been to set Hebrews to fight to the death with each other before him. Only the Hebrews knew that, kidnapped and brought to the edge of the desert, he had been slain in single combat by Moses.

Yes, Moses thought, he had builded well. By measures such as these and by perfecting himself once more in that power of producing illusion in which long ago at On he had been so proficient, the legend of Moses, the Egyptian Prince who, cast forth from Egypt, had been brought by Yahweh, their ancient God, to lead them out of bondage, had swollen to gigantic proportions

among the Hebrews. All the leaders in this room, with the possible exception of Nun, accepted him blindly as the chosen of Yahweh and as somewhat more than man.

Which was as it should be. A leader, to have a people follow him without doubt or questioning as the Hebrews must follow him, must be regarded as, if not God, at least the chosen agent of God. Nor had he known, three years ago, that it would be so simple. It had not been clear to him then that, if one used the right method, one could write what one liked on the pages of men's minds, particularly if those men were oppressed and discontented. It was true that he would have liked more time in order to make the whole mass of the Hebrews as fanatically devoted to himself and to the promises he held forth from Yahweh as this group was.

Still, that was not vital. If, in a nation of slaves, one controlled a small, fanatic, closely knit organization, as he did, that was what was needed. Take Joshua there. That young man would lop off his father's head and not blink an eye, if Moses commanded it. With men behind him like Joshua, he held the Hebrews in his power. Whether they liked it or not they would become Yahweh's people. Whether they wished it or not, they would be led out from Egypt into the desert. Yes, Yahweh had shown him the way. Be mysterious. Be not too common. Never say or do too much; but let each word and action be momentous.

These were the thoughts in Moses' mind as he waited, not because these men were not ready to hear him speak, but because he wished to impress on them the gravity, the expectancy of the moment. When he was satisfied, he took a step forward. He said:

"My brothers, Aaron has already spoken to you. He has reminded you of the promises of Yahweh, God of our fathers, the God who brought me up from Sinai to you, that, at some time, ye should be freed from bondage and led forth from Egypt into Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey. Do ye believe those promises?"

"We do believe," the deep-throated answer came back to him. Moses took another step forward. He towered before them. He said, raising his voice:

"This night I come before you. This night I tell you that the hour of your deliverance is at hand."

He paused. He listened to the flutter of movements. He sensed the air of excitement, the unasked question in their minds. One did not, of course, tell even these elders and leaders all that was toward. Moses, for instance, did not tell them that yesterday Aaron and he had received a message from Elihun, who had been

posted in Tanis, that a fresh band of the Peoples of the Sea had landed amongst the Libyan Tehenu and were inciting them to invade Egypt. Not to tell them was, of course, wise. Then, if an invasion occurred, Moses would get the credit for foreknowledge of events; while if nothing happened, no harm was done. When they were quieted once more, expectant, waiting, he raised his hand again.

"Aye," he said, "the hour of your deliverance has come. For, tomorrow, I and Aaron, my brother, journey forth to Memphis, even to the court of the Pharaoh. There will we speak with the Pharaoh. There will we bid him in the name of Yahweh to let His people go."

He waited a moment for the first irrepressible burst of excitement to die down. Then, he raised his voice powerfully:

"Aye, the moment has come. And ye must be ready. Do you, Joshua, have your companies of young men prepared. Do you, Hur and Elkanah and Ittai and the rest of you, return to your villages and make the people ready. For I say unto you that surely the Day of Deliverance is at hand, the Day which I AM revealed to me in Sinai."

They were, he could feel, ready to do his bidding, believing in him absolutely. But he was not yet content. His rod was on the table. He reached over and picked it up. At this simple gesture there was an abrupt and complete silence in the hut. Once more all eyes were turned on Moses. He felt the power surge up within him. He looked around at them slowly, fixing each man individually, projecting his presence out of himself as Ipuwer long ago had shown him how to do. He was skilled in this now after three years on the edge of the desert, more skilled than he had ever been, more forceful, more mature so that at times he himself was almost frightened by the illusions he could produce, as if some Power from without himself took possession of him. He waited, struggling with their minds until he was sure that all their minds, even Nun's, were subjected to his own. Then with a sudden gesture, he held up the rod.

"This rod," he said, his eyes not leaving their faces as they stared at it, awed, expectant, "was given to me by Him who dwells on Sinai."

They stared at it. He waited. Then, abruptly, in one great, surging effort, the sweat breaking forth on his brow, he put forth all his will upon them, producing illusion; and suddenly before their eyes the rod was no longer a rod but a writhing, twisting serpent, rearing its head angrily, its forked tongue flickering, its evil eyes glistening. There was a hiss of indrawn breath around the room, as if it were a single indrawn breath. For a

long instant he held the illusion before them. Then, abruptly he released his hold on their minds; and, just as abruptly, the rod was no longer a serpent but was merely a rod, dull and lifeless in his hand. He laid it on the table. He heard the wearisome sigh of their exhaled breaths. He turned to them, exaltation filling him.

"Ye have seen!" he cried at them. "Now, do ye believe Now, will ye follow Yahweh whither he leads you, whatsoever he bids you do?"

"We will!"

It was a single voice. Moses towered before them, gigantic in the rushlight.

"And will ye make a covenant with Yahweh? A covenant that He shall be your God and ye shall be His people to do with as He wills, for good and for evil, for blessing and for punishment, for sorrow and for pain?"

"We will."

"Then, in the name of Yahweh, I accept you as His people. Yet all the people must make the covenant. Look well to it, you Hur, and you, Elkanah, and you, Ittai. Go forth to the people. Bid them that on the night that I proclaim to them, shall they make a covenant with Yahweh, the covenant of a young lamb from the flock, spotless and unblemished, slain and eaten betwixt dusk and dawn, so that not a hair, not a hoof, not an entrail remains. For the ram is the sign of Yahweh, God of Sinai; and so shall ye be sealed to Him and safe from His awful power when He shall take vengeance on the Egyptians. Thus shall He know that ye are His people. Will ye do this also? For so hath Yahweh commanded."

"We will."

Moses dropped his hand. He did not explain to the elder that this covenant was the covenant which, each year, the Kenites renewed with Yahweh under Sinai. Better for them to think that this was a special pronouncement from Yahweh for them alone, and thus, and by other symbols such as these would they come to feel that they were a people apart, a people under the special protection of Yahweh. He turned away, wiping the sweat from his brow. From the corner where he was crouched Nun watched Aaron step forward and, raising his hands high call down the blessing of Yahweh upon them. Then it was time to go. Nun followed the others as they filed out, their feet stumbling, an aura of awe and belief emanating from them. By his side, as they came into the open under the stars, he heard Joshua, his son, draw in the deep breath of one who has passed through a soul-stirring experience. On Nun's own lips there

was a slight, a cynical smile. For Nun, too, had in his youth studied under the priests of Ra at On. And Nun, alone of these Hebrews, was able to form a clear concept of the methods Moses had used and was using.

The knowledge, indeed, did not, as he plodded on through the darkness realizing himself remote in feeling from his companions and even from his son, destroy his belief that in the great Design of the Universe Moses had been vouchsafed for the brief instant of his life an important part. To be convinced of this, however, was not to abdicate his reason. Nun could see that Moses was a different person, not only from the smooth-skinned youth who had fled from Egypt but even from the desert chieftain who had assaulted the Wall of the Princes. That Moses had been direct and vital and uncompromising. This Moses had, it was true, an even more undeviating singleness of purpose. But he was also subtle and calculating and clever, a man who kept much to himself and who planned for effect and watched like a hawk for the success or failure of those effects, a man who, supremely able to influence and delude people, was also capable at times of deluding himself.

How this had come about, Nun did not know. He could sense that Moses must have passed through some shattering and moulding experience. It was clear to him that the man believed as firmly and fanatically in Yahweh and the mission assigned to him by Yahweh as Joshua and the other Hebrews believed in Moses. What interested Nun, however, was that this man was indubitably a leader of such a character that he, if anyone, was now able to devise the means whereby the Hebrews could be led out of Egypt and made into a nation. Which was, probably, part of the Design.

And yet one could not forbear to smile. One could not but reflect, if one had intelligence, that if the Hebrews did win free from Egypt, they would discover that they had exchanged many taskmasters for one. Nor could one help but sneer within oneself at Yahweh, the God of Sinai, and the blood covenant with Him which was proposed. In what respect, Nun asked himself, casting a casual glance up at the stars in the velvet sky, did this Yahweh, in essence, differ from the great gods of Egypt, except insofar as He was a wilderness God and had, therefore, the morals and habits and viewpoint of a desert people? Or in what respect was Moses different from the priests of Egypt? Did they not also delude with promises and illusions and threats of punishments and with the declaration that they alone knew the will of the gods?

Apparently, however, such delusion was necessary. Nun

could remember how, in his youth, with the intolerance and fine enthusiasm of youth, he had dreamed of a happy age when humanity would rise to such a height that people could guide their lives by their own reason and have no need of gods to fear or of priests who pretended that they alone could properly interpret the will of God or the gods.

But he had been young then. With age had come wisdom and the perception that the main mass of humanity had not enough intelligence wherewith to guide themselves and that, moreover, men preferred not to think or try to think for themselves but rather to have their ideas and their customs and their beliefs imposed on them. That way was easier. That way one did not have to think. One could be outraged properly and decently at anything unusual, anything which did not conform to the accepted thing. One had a rule to live by instead of having the trouble of thinking out what one ought to do and of estimating each act by the motives behind the act. Rules made it simple. The rules simply said this act was good and that one bad and it was settled. In addition, people felt that they needed to have the rules sanctified by some god or other and priests to tell them how to worship the gods and what the rules of the gods were—which was profitable for the priests. Therefore, Nun did not criticize Moses for introducing Yahweh. How else could he unite this race of slaves and make them feel that they were a nation? How else than by stamping out the worship of the Egyptian gods as far as he could and substituting a new god, a God from faraway and yet one traditionally connected with those legends of the founding of the Hebrews which had been magnified by time—how else could he make them feel utterly distinct from the Egyptians and all other races? Yes, Nun decided, Moses was wise. But his wisdom could not prevent the freedom of Nun's thoughts.

He had got this far in his reflections when, at his side, Joshua said:

"Was it not wondrous?"

Nun smiled wryly. But it was of no use to point out his speculations to his son. Joshua accepted every word and every action of Moses as if Moses were Yahweh Himself. And Joshua, at nineteen, was already the commander of all the bands of young fellows in Goshen.

"Yes," Nun agreed, wishing with part of his mind that he could have Joshua's unquestioning faith, that he could be as Joshua was, one who accepted what was told him without a single doubt to trouble him and went out to do, practically and efficiently, the job he was given to do.

"Is he not a mighty leader? Can you not feel the spirit of Yahweh move in the man when he speaks?"

"Yes," Nun agreed again.

Back in the hut they had left, Moses sat on the bench behind the table and watched the shadows flicker on the mud-brick walls, feeling, as always after such a high moment, a sense of depression and futility, his mind blank so that vagrant thoughts flitted across its surface, scarcely rippling it. By his side Aaron looked down at him hesitatingly, wanting to speak, but, as yet, not quite daring to. Aaron, who had lived in Memphis and in Tanis and in Avaris, might tell himself that the magic of Moses was illusion. He might remind himself, as he had often tried to, that it was he, not Moses, who had done the organizing among the Hebrews and that, as the elder brother and the one who possessed property and a house, he should be the senior member of this partnership.

It had not worked out this way. There was something about this brother of his which made Aaron afraid, which caused him, when a crisis came, to give way to Moses. Aaron could not understand it. Time after time, he would decide to put Moses in his place and to establish their relationship on a proper footing. When it came to the pinch, however, as now, he found himself at a loss. It had appalled him when Moses, without having said a word to him beforehand, had flung out the announcement to the meeting that the two of them were leaving in the morning to go to Memphis. He had scarcely been able to believe his ears. This idea had never been discussed between them. It had never even been hinted at. How in the world had his brother come to conceive this crazy, this dangerous idea? To put one's head into the lion's mouth? And to what purpose?

These were the questions hovering on the tip of his tongue as he looked at Moses. And then his brother stirred. Moses had been recollecting that, not feeling it safe to be seen in Tanis and having been completely given over to his mission, he had not yet seen his mother. He said reflectively:

"You say that our mother was even weaker when you were last in Tanis?"

"Yes."

"I wish that I could have seen her before we started for Memphis."

"Memphis!" Aaron burst out. "What in the world ever gave you the idea of going to Memphis?"

"Didn't I tell you? We must get there while it is still uncertain whether the Tehenu and the Peoples of the Sea will march or not."

"What good will that do? What good will the two of us do, whether the Tehenu march or not, before the Pharaoh? At the best he will laugh at us."

"It is Yahweh's command," Moses said simply. He spoke and acted as if the matter were all settled. Aaron wanted to tear at his hair.

"Why would it not be better to wait and see whether the Tehenu will march or not?" he demanded.

"No one knows what barbarians will do. No, it is better to go while the question is still uncertain, while the Pharaoh is still under the fear of what may happen. That way, he will listen to us."

Aaron lost his patience. "Do you think for a moment that the Pharaoh will listen to us in any case, Tehenu or no Tehenu?" he almost shouted. "Where are your brains, Moses? What in the world makes you think that the Pharaoh will listen to us? The Pharaoh of Egypt and me, a merchant, you a desert chieftain! Do you think that all you have to do is to say: 'Let my people go' and he will do it? No, he will put us to the torture. It is a fool's plan, a madman's plan. Two of us before the might of the Pharaoh!"

"It is Yahweh's command."

"We may not even get an audience."

"You are subtle. And you are an important merchant in Tanis."

What could you do with a man like that? Aaron wanted to beat on the table with his fist, to shout, to say that he would not go. As always, something in his brother's bearing and in his calm assumption that, of course, Aaron would do what he wanted, prevented it. Even as he stood there, seething, Aaron knew dully and angrily that he would go.

CHAPTER II

ALL the way up the easternmost branch of the Nile, the years had seemed to have been retreating on silent feet. He stood at the side of the river craft on which he and Aaron were travelling—Aaron as Hadad the prosperous Syrian merchant of Tanis and Avaris, and himself in the best disguise possible, namely as Reuel, a desert chieftain—and stared out at the reeds and the palms and acacias which lined the banks and at the fields of the Northland, green and level in the sun. It was so fertile a land after the desert. The barley and the wheat bent gracefully to

the wind in lazy ripples. The white-walled villages were like glistening rocks. The canals sparkled in the sun like gleaming ribbons, and the peasants stopped their work to stare at the boat gliding by. On the banks the women, come down to the Nile for water, were gay and vivid in their dresses of terra-cotta red and green and yellow and plum, tossing back words and laughter at them. The years dropped off his shoulders—all the weary years, all the fierce years, all the lean years in the barren wilderness where the sun is a ball of molten brass and there is never a speck of green and the sand mocks at you and the dry hard colours of the rocks sneer at you—so that for a moment he was a boy again and a Prince of Egypt and Tharbis stood by his side and the world was his for the taking. He found a sob in his throat, an unavailing cry for time to turn backward and to bring alive once more the wondrous, the marvellous days of youth.

He did not want to feel this. He wanted to feel, as he had felt in Goshen, that he was Moses, the Deliverer, Moses, the Chosen of Yahweh, Moses who had been vomited forth from Egypt and who returned now at the bidding of I AM to lead the Hebrews out of bondage. So he hardened his heart. He blocked off Tharbis. He thought of Merneptah. He told himself that he hated Egypt.

He could not succeed. He could not altogether prevent the feeling of yearning, the sad requiem for the days that once had been, which eats away the heart of a man and makes him feeble with tenderness; even as a man looks on a woman whom once he has loved and who has betrayed him: he vows he hates her and he should hate her for what she has done to him, yet when he sees her his heart grows weak within him. This was Egypt which he had once loved. These peasants and their women were the peasants and their women—or others like them—whom once he had looked upon, loving them because they were part of Egypt, taking into his heart their carved, age-old faces, listening to the age-old songs with their haunting note of sadness, watching the children at their play. No, one could hate Rameses. One could hate Merneptah. One could loathe Tharbis. But, at the last, he found he could not hate Egypt and these simple folk who were the soul of Egypt.

And so they swam slowly up the Nile, and the gold-capped obelisk of Ra came into view, and he stood at the side of the ship and picked out the temple courts of Ra and remembered Ipuwer, that wise old man. For an instant, he was a boy again in the peaceful courts, and Ipuwer looked at him and smiled at him. He gazed at the green fields around the city, lying stretched out

under the sun, and Niiy was alive in his mind, Niiy, that laughing girl. Where was she now, he wondered. Ipuwer was dead. And Rameses was dead. But Niiy surely was still among the living. Did she ever think of Aahmose, that youth of Egypt, to whom she had taught the mysteries of love, smiling so tenderly at his wonder and his pleasure?

The memory brought a sigh to his lips, so that Aaron, whose thoughts were on far different things, glanced at him sharply. Aaron, in fact, was in a sweat of fear. The scheme had seemed foolish and dangerous in Goshen. In this moment it seemed ten times more dangerous and absurd. Aaron had done what he could. Through a heavy bribe, sent ahead by fast courier to Sabu, the vizier who had taken the dead Intef's place, an audience had been arranged with the Pharaoh for Hadad, the prosperous merchant of Tanis, on matters vital to the welfare of Egypt.

But what to say when they did stand before the Pharaoh? How approach the subject of the Hebrews?

These were the problems which were troubling Aaron, who was wishing heartily that he had never got himself involved with his brother. He had already drafted out a dozen different ways of approaching the question of the Hebrews. As On began to recede he fell to planning busily again.

And meantime the boat came out into the undivided Nile. More slowly now, since the current was stronger, they proceeded up towards Memphis. Around them, as the afternoon waned, the river was thick with traffic, the galleys from distant lands, the countless boats of the country folk, the warships of the Pharaoh, just as Moses had so often remembered it. On either side stretched the avenues of palms and beyond them the fields were richly green and beyond them again the hills drew together. Nothing, not even the Northland had so affected him. For here was the Egypt he had known as a boy. He stared out at the flat-topped western hills, a rampart of rugged gold in the sunlight. He looked up the broad river ahead to Memphis. He glanced at the villas and palaces of the nobles which now lined the banks. He could name them—or name them as they had used to be. That villa was Neyah's and that was Ranofers and there, towering in splendour among the green, its walls fluttering with red and white pennants, was the palace of the Pharaoh, Rameses the Great.

For an instant he could forget that Rameses was dead. For a moment he could stare at those walls and remember the majesty of the man he had believed to be his grandfather and see him sitting on his golden throne, the great double crown of holy Kham on his head, the crook of power and the whip of punish-

ment in his hands. Then, memory flooded back. It was not Rameses within those walls. It was Merneptah whom he hated, whom he had always hated, Merneptah who possessed Tharbis. He cursed and clenched his hands so that those nearest him, looked at him and moved away uneasily. This wild desert chieftain in his stinking woollen robes—who knew what he might do?

Moses did not notice them. There was a struggle within him. For he knew that the palace of the woman he had believed to be his mother was coming into view and he did not want to look at it. So he went across to the other side of the boat and stared obstinately at the hills. Yet he could not persist. In spite of himself, he turned around. There it was, the palace of the Princess Bint-Anath, just as he so often had seen it. He stared at it, grinding his teeth, the cords of his jaws standing out, trying to hate it, trying not to think of the Princess Bint-Anath as she had been when he was a boy but only as she had been in those last few days at Avaris, hateful, scheming, poisonous.

He found that he could not. He found that, in spite of himself, the tears were coming to his eyes. He gave up the struggle. Like a man in a trance he made his way back to the side of the boat nearest the shore. There was the cove from which Jochebed and he had gone up to Memphis to see Uncle Amram. And there was the garden wall and the tiny spit of land which had been his own domain. The years dropped away altogether. His heart was defenceless to memory and the tears ran down his cheeks, unheeded, in sadness for that boy who had been so unhappy and so unknowing, who had not realized that life could be bitter, that life could be cruel, that it stripped all that was lovely, all that was beautiful, all that was hopeful from one until only the sour core remained. How far was he away from that happy boy! Why could not the wheel of time turn back? Once he had been a boy, a Prince of Egypt, within those walls. Now, he stood on the deck of a boat, a desert chieftain dressed in barbaric woollens, and looked at it with alien eyes, divorced from it by more than the years.

And how foolish he was to think that he could challenge Egypt! The thought occurred to him for the first time, as it had never come to him during the attack on Egypt, since the attack had had military chances of success. Similarly, while in Goshen, still living a semi-desert life and absorbed in his planning and his mission and not coming into contact with Egypt itself, the idea of failure had never crossed his mind. Now, however, remembering his youth and seeing around him as the boat slid on the material evidences of Egypt's power and prosperity—her

villas, her palaces, her teeming villages, her fertile fields, her boats—he realized forcefully that he was moving against the legendary strength of Egypt, not with a tremendous host as was necessary, but only with a force of an idea.

At this moment the idea seemed feeble. In this instant Sinai and the God of Sinai seemed far away. He tried to stretch out his mind to Yahweh, to come into communion with Him. But he could not seem to visualize the cloud-capped peak or the silent wastes or the bush that burned but was not consumed or materialize the still small Voice. Instead, before him, he beheld rising above the walls of Memphis the gleaming obelisks and pylons of the mighty temple of Ptah, and in his mind's eyes these merged suddenly with the majestic hypostyle hall at Karnak and with Amon sitting in majesty on his golden throne. Like a sudden dirge the words of Jethro rang in his ears:

"Yahweh hath no power in Egypt. In Egypt the gods of Egypt have power."

It was a treacherous thought, a plausible thought to Moses. He was not a sceptic like Nun. He was not even like Ipuwer, to whom the idea of one Power ruling all the universe and all the nations was conceivable and credible. Moses could not attain this idea of deity. He was too much in the current of the thought of the world in which he lived, a world in which there were many deities each with his or her special duties and particular provinces and powers. Deities such as these were, in Moses' concept of them, limited in scope. They tended to rule only within their own country. When they did advance beyond their own borders, there were the gods of the alien country to contend with, and Moses, as an Egyptian, was familiar with the prayers and spells by which, when he had sailed up to Kush, for instance, the priests of Egypt had weakened the power of the gods of Kush so that the gods of Egypt, even in faraway Kush, might prevail.

It was natural for him, therefore, to entertain Jethro's suggestion with misgivings. Yahweh, if that name pleased the great I AM, was God of Sinai and the peninsula of Sinai. As one proceeded further away from Him, His power must lessen. The gods of Egypt were strong. How, then, could Yahweh stand up in the struggle with them? How, then, could Yahweh help him?

These thoughts, even though he tried to beat them back, grew on him during the next few days in Memphis. He went down by the docks. Thick was the tangle of the boats and loud the shouting and huge the stores and manifold the goods which were being loaded and unloaded. He wandered through the streets, noting the multitudinous life; the busy merchants, the

streets of craftsmen, the hurrying porters, the tellers of tales, the sedan chairs, the chariots, the soldiers. He went into the great temple of Ptah, and there the shaven-skulled priests swung their censers and intoned their prayers; and as the people bowed, the image of Ptah raised his hand in benediction and a voice issued from his lips to bless the people.

Moses might know how the trick was done, how a priest concealed behind a curtain spoke through Ptah's lips, how a pulley beneath the floor worked Ptah's hand. But he could not escape the weight of the belief pressing on him from the masses around him, masses who, he realized suddenly, believed as blindly in Ptah and his power as he believed in Yahweh. Nor could he prevent the sense of the greatness and the age-old power of Egypt from creeping insidiously within his very soul. His confidence drained from him. He was no longer sure that he was chosen of Yahweh to lead the Hebrews forth from Egypt. Nor was he even too certain that Yahweh was a mighty God. His father had prayed to Yahweh. Yet for over forty years the Hebrews had laboured in bondage. Did that seem as if Yahweh had power in Egypt?

CHAPTER III

BUT, when, ten days later, he stood before the Pharaoh, his fear left him, left him as swiftly as a frightened bird takes flight from a limb, and was replaced by such pure, unalloyed hatred as leaves room for no other emotion. He did not see the others in the room, Amenemhab, priest of Amon, and Snefre, priest of Ptah, and Sebeknefrure, soothsayer and magician of the Pharaoh, together with his attendant magicians, and Sabu, Vizier of the Northland. All he saw as he stood in this private inner pleasance of the Pharaoh's, where a yellow-striped awning was stretched over the Pharaoh's carven chair against the sun and in the pool the blue lotus-flowers opened their hearts of gold and the pink flamingoes stood on one leg among the flowers, was Merneptah himself. He was heavier with the years. Under the fine linen kilt and tunic with their elaborate pleats and vivid touches of colour, his gross corpulency could be seen; and under the wig and crown his eyes were pouched with fat, and on either side of the false ceremonial beard his heavy jowls drooped down. But the staring, obstinate eyes were the same, and so were the thick, sensual lips and the chin which gave the lie to his pretension of firmness. Moses would have liked to have leaped upon him. He would have liked to have seized that fat neck and

strangled it and he wondered that Merneptah could not feel the hate which flowed out from him.

But Merneptah stared at the two strangers who had been brought in under guard and were standing, waiting his pleasure, with only a trace of curiosity. Aaron, as Hadad, was known to him by reputation as a wealthy merchant with connections up through Syria and Canaan and out over the desert; and indeed it was this reputation, along with the bribe to Sabu, which had secured the interview. The Pharaoh passed him by with little more than a glance, though he remembered and stored away for future reference that the Vizier of the Northland had whispered to him how it was said that lately this man had been seen more than once in Goshen among the Hebrews. Still, since the Hebrews were now building Pithom in Goshen as a fortress city and since around the building of a fortress city there are supplies to be sold and contracts for stone and food to be arranged for, that might be natural. But it was the other stranger who drew a second glance from him. He was a barbarian, of course, and as such beneath notice. One had only to observe his long, unkempt beard and his stinking, bright-coloured woollen robes, decorated in an outlandish pattern with darts of red and green, to realize that. Yet his lean, hawk face was compelling. So were the eyes which in their fixity and intensity were disconcerting. Merneptah wondered briefly where he had seen such eyes before.

He dismissed the wonder, remembering that he had other things to worry him. The victory over Canaan had been a mighty triumph. He had hoped at the time that it would be the end of his troubles. The same hope had been within him, when a year ago, he had returned from Nubia. Instead, his difficulties were increasing. An empty treasury, he had found, could not easily be filled; and the peasants murmured at his exactions as they had never dared to murmur in the days of his father, Rameses the Great. Yet the mercenaries who crowded his armies must, be paid; and the priests of Ptah and the priests of Amon and the priests of Osiris and the priests of Ra and of all the other gods clamoured for more temples and more offerings, each vying with the other. Moreover, when you gave to one—as give you must, for otherwise would not the gods be angry and withdraw their protection?—you had to give to all. As if that were not enough the multitudinous sons and grandsons and great-grandsons of Rameses were all pressing upon him for lands and villas so that, at times, Merneptah wished in vexation that his father had not been so virile.

These were troubles enough, since all Egypt was seething

with intrigue and discontent. But now a new danger loomed. Now, at last the Peoples of the Sea were beginning to knock at the very gates of Egypt. Merneptah, who had not the slightest faculty for taking a long view of events, was in no wise able to see that this was the inevitable result of the new waves of blue-eyed barbarians who were rolling down year after year and decade after decade from the North on the Kheta and on the other lands around the Inland Sea, destroying the balance of affairs and sending the Peoples of the Sea wandering restlessly. To him it was a special plague visited on him by some god whom he must have offended. He had had hecatombs of victims slain. He had had prayers offered up in a special day of intercession in all the multitudinous temples of Egypt. He had consulted his soothsayers.

But still the troubles mounted, as if prayers, however pious, were of no avail. The Libyans, who had been allowed to settle in the western part of the Northland, were openly mutinous and threatening. The chieftain of the Tehenu had repulsed Merneptah's offer of a segment of Egypt and peace. What to do next?

This was what was troubling the Pharaoh, and it was all in his mind as he decided to get this audience over and motioned to Aaron and Moses to come forward. Aaron dropped on his knees, with a whispered word to Moses to do the same, and began to crawl towards the Pharaoh, salaaming with his forehead to the ground at every third movement of his knees. Moses looked down at him. He knew that this was the customary way to approach the Pharaoh and that it might draw suspicion and danger on himself if he did not follow Aaron's example. Then he glanced up at Merneptah. By Yahweh Himself, he would not crawl to him. In six great strides he was across the space and standing in front of the Pharaoh, uncompromisingly erect. A Sherden swordsman started forward. Aaron rose up on his knees hurriedly.

"Pardon him, O Mighty One," he babbled. "He is but a barbarian."

With a gesture of his hand Merneptah checked the Sherden, though there was a spot of colour on either cheek. He stared at Moses, puzzled again by the sense of there being something vaguely familiar about the eyes.

"Who is this man?" he asked.

Moses' face tightened. Before he could speak Aaron said hastily from his knees:

"He is Reuel, a chieftain from the desert, O Wearer-of-the-Double-Crown."

Merneptah looked at Aaron. "Why have you brought him here?" he inquired.

"He is a man who seeth into the future, O Majesty," Aaron said humbly.

"Who seeth into the future," Merneptah repeated meditatively. He leaned back in his chair and looked at Sebeknefrure, his chief soothsayer. "My soothsayers also look into the future," he observed.

"This man is from the desert, O He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken," Aaron explained submissively. "In the desert, so it has been said, men can see more clearly." He saw Merneptah nod in assent and went on: "He hath beheld portents and dangers for Egypt, O Ruler-of-the-Two-Lands. He hath heard from God Himself what must be done to avert those dangers."

There might be something in it, Merneptah reflected, caressing his cheek thoughtfully. It would make his own soothsayers angry if he listened to this man from the desert. Yet this Syrian merchant might be right. It was true that it was said that there were strange things to be seen in the desert and that men who dwelt in those empty spaces possessed strange powers. To a man as superstitious and as given to belief in spells and charms and portents as Merneptah the temptation was irresistible. He knew Sebeknefrure was frowning at him. But he was like a drunkard before whom one sets a new drink.

"Let him speak," he said.

"He is not skilled in the Egyptian tongue, O Shepherd-of-Thy-People," Aaron put in hastily. "If I were to tell what he has said?"

Merneptah regarded him with his dull stare. "Speak on, Syrian."

Aaron spoke cringingly, ingratiatingly. As he stood and listened Moses could not but admire the cleverness of it. Aaron sketched the troubles of Egypt. He mentioned the murmuring of the people, the intrigues in the land, and in passing, very subtly, the danger that he, as a Syrian, feared for Egypt from the presence of a mass of discontented Hebrew slaves within the very borders of Egypt if any assault should be made on Holy Kham. He went on to refer to the Peoples of the Sea who had landed amongst the Tehenu and mentioned how apprehensive the merchants in Tanis and Avaris were lest, suddenly, these allied hordes should pour across the frontier.

"But to this man of God hath been vouchsafed the vision of a new danger," he continued. "You will remember how, three years ago, whilst thy Majesty was smiting the rebellious of Canaan, out of the desert came one day an assault on the Wall

of the Princes. This is as naught to what is preparing. For in a vision Reuel hath seen it. The God of Sinai is angry with Egypt for that the Hebrews are bondsmen to the Egyptians. And the God of Sinai is a mighty God. For he dwelleth on the mountain peak and His chariot is the storm cloud and the lightning is His sword. Now He hath turned his eyes on Egypt. He hath seen how the Hebrews who, aforetime, before they came into Egypt, were amongst His people, suffer at the hands of the Egyptians. His wrath is stirred. So even at this moment He is stretching forth His hand to stir up the Peoples of the Desert and the Peoples of the North against Egypt. Reuel hath seen His purpose. For the God of Sinai hath spoken to Reuel. Reuel hath seen the Peoples of the North swarming down through Canaan, more numerous than the sands of the sea, to fling themselves on Egypt. And in his vision hath he seen another host, the host of the desert, rush forth to join them so that Egypt will stand in mighty peril unless the God of Sinai is placated, O Mighty One."

"He is a vapourer, O Ruler of Egypt," the High Priest of Amon burst out. "For our soothsayers have not seen this. How then should a barbarian of the desert behold it?"

But Merneptah made a gesture for him to be silent. "How then is the God of Sinai to be placated?" he inquired.

Aaron salaamed to the ground. "Let the Hebrews go forth from Egypt, O Majesty," he suggested deferentially.

"Let the Hebrews go forth?" Sabu the Vizier of the Northland, exclaimed hotly. "Who then will build your cities, O Horus-On-Earth? From whence shall we draw our wheat and our cattle and our flocks? The peasants of Egypt murmur as it is. Will they not murmur ten times more when our bondsmen are gone."

"I did not mean to let them go entirely, O Divine One," Aaron interposed hastily. "That would be folly. Let those of the Hebrews who will, go forth on a three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice unto the God of Sinai. Only a three days' journey. So then will He be placated. So then, thinking that they are free, will the God of Sinai turn His wrathful eyes from Egypt to some other land. For He will think the Hebrews set free. So is the advice of Reuel, the man of God from the desert. And so," he added cunningly, "may something of the discontent of the Hebrews be allayed so that they will not be a danger, should the Tehenu and the Peoples of the Sea burst into Egypt."

Merneptah sat back undecided. From around him a babble of voices arose. The Vizier of the Northland was opposed. So was the High Priest of Amon. But the High Priest of Ra, who

was jealous of Amon, supported Aaron's idea. It would do no harm, he argued. Even if this were but a vain vision of this Reuel who stood before them, it would be best not to take chances in these days when all the world was in turmoil. A three days' march was not much to give to deprecate evil.

"Then who will continue the labour on the Pharaoh's city of Pithom?" demanded the Vizier of the Northland. "And who will bring the Hebrews back from the wilderness? Three days' march into the wilderness. Are we to send an army to bring them back?"

Merneptah turned to Sebeknefrure. "What says my soothsayer?" he asked.

The soothsayer scowled at Moses. "I have not seen aught of any vision such as this stranger tells of," he said. "And I have cast further into the future than any mortal man. I say unto you, O Mighty Master, that he lies."

"But——" Aaron began.

Moses, however, had had enough. He took one great stride forward.

"And I say unto you, O Pharaoh of Egypt, let My people go. Such is the word of I AM, the Lord God of Sinai. Let My People go lest evils fall upon you. For such is the will of the Lord God. And lo, if you believe Him not, He will send plague and terror on Egypt and the land shall be filled with blood."

The Pharaoh stared at him, so shaken by the blazing eyes and the power which breathed forth from this man that he did not remember that he was not supposed to speak Egyptian. Moses stared back at him and it seemed to him in this moment that he was filled by some Power from without himself. He knew that familiar feeling. Exultation filled him—exultation and confidence and a sense of power, power, so he thought at this moment, which was beyond the power of man. Yea, Yahweh was with him. He cast his eyes upon them all, forcing himself out of himself, projecting himself, imposing his spirit upon them. And then, lifting up his rod, he held it still a moment until all their eyes were upon it and then flung it on the floor and abruptly, as Merneptah looked and as all of them looked, lo, a hissing writhing serpent was on the ground and it reared its head and puffed out its hood and its forked tongue flickered. For a long moment Moses held the illusion against them all. Then, he reached out his hand and the serpent struck up at it and, lo, it was a rod again.

"Now," said Moses. "Now will you let My people go?"

The Pharaoh glanced around him. The chief soothsayer said scornfully to his magicians. "Come." They stood all six of them

in a row. At a signal they cast down their rods and, lo, six serpents hissed and writhed. The Pharaoh uttered a laugh of relief and started to lean back. But Moses with a violent gesture flung down his rod again and it twisted, facing the other serpents and advanced upon them. Moses gazed deep into the eyes of Sebeknefrure, the chief soothsayer. For long instants, whilst their wills battled with each other, there was violent confusion on the floor and the serpents were tangled in a writhing, twisting mass. But then, before the Pharaoh's eyes, the serpent of Moses with its hooded head, fell upon the other serpents on the floor, and swallowed them from head to scaly tail, until there was only it on the floor and it raised its eyes and puffed out its hood and swayed dangerously before the Pharaoh. Moses said no word. But he stared at the Pharaoh. Merneptah cried out:

"Let the Lord God of Sinai do with the Hebrews what He wills. Let him go out into the wilderness."

So Moses put out his hand and the serpent became a rod again, but, lo, the rods of the Egyptian magicians were no longer there. Aaron could not guess where they had gone. Nor could Sebeknefrure. He took a step backward, trembling. The Pharaoh glanced at him and saw the wonder and the fear in his chief magician's face. It made him stretch out a hand to the scribe at his feet.

"Write," Merneptah said hastily. "Write and I will sign."

The scribe at the Pharaoh's feet wrote it out hastily. Merneptah signed it. He looked up.

"But only for three days, remember," he said, his native suspicion and obstinacy reasserting itself.

"Three days, Majesty," Aaron agreed.

"And now, begone," the Pharaoh cried. "Take this—this man from the desert from out of my sight. Begone."

Moses turned on his heel and strode to the door. Behind him, Aaron backed away from before the Pharaoh. Moses waited for him. They started to walk down the long gleaming corridor to the entrance. Aaron was bubbling over with exultation since, in his heart of hearts, he had never dreamt that they could succeed. Moses was silent. Virtue had gone out of him in that battle of wills and the hatred he had poured towards Merneptah had exhausted him, particularly since he had not been able, as his whole being had craved, to fling into Merneptah's teeth who he really was. This, however, was part of his pact with Yahweh under Sinai and it suddenly came to him in a flash of triumph that Yahweh evidently had power, even in Egypt. Yes, he thought, Yahweh had stretched forth his hand, even

from far-off Sinai, and had touched him, Moses, in the palace of the Pharaoh, in the very heart of Egypt, and had filled him with power. Did not this mean that Yahweh was more powerful than the gods of Egypt? By Yahweh, it was so. And he was the chosen of Yahweh.

As he thought this, and as a sense of victorious exaltation began to fill him at the thought of it, out of a side passage before them stepped a woman and began to walk down the corridor in front of them. Aaron did not notice her particularly. But Moses stopped in his tracks. That sway of her waist, that poise of her head and body—he would know it anywhere, at any time. It was Tharbis!

He did not know that he had called out her name aloud until he saw her pause and turn and look behind her. The years had touched her lightly. There was the same clear, melancholy profile, the same deep eyes with the illusion about them of mysterious knowledge and of insight into this world and the sadness of it which had captivated him a score of years before. Those eyes looked over him casually, disdainfully, and she turned on her heel, even as she had turned, there in the palace entrance at Avaris so long ago. By Yahweh, she shall not scorn me a second time, Moses thought fiercely. In three great strides he had overtaken her. He seized her by the shoulder. He turned her about. She looked up at him without a trace of fear, and the corners of her mouth had the hint of a smile about them. Rough-looking—but handsome, Tharbis was thinking. I wonder who he is. And wondered also why this bearded stranger stared at her so fiercely.

"Wanton—adulteress—traitress!" Moses flung at her.

Her eyes opened wider. With a tiny gesture she freed her shoulders from his grasp. She did not speak. There was a hint of a sway about her body, a seductive sway. With a deep stab at his heart Moses realized that, though nearing forty, this, woman, who should have been showing the furrowing of the years, was more beautiful than she had been. The breasts might be a little heavier and not quite so pouting. The hips might be rounder and the waist a little fuller, but these changes, slight as they were, only added to her body a further hint of voluptuousness and gave a perverse, a provocative contrast to the seeming purity and melancholy of her face. He knew desire for her, desire and a wild upsurging passion. It infuriated him. It drove him to frenzy, also, to realize that whilst he had been sunk in the very abyss of agony of the spirit, she had gone lightly on her way, untouched. Had he seen her in misery and poverty, deserted by her beauty, he would have felt pity and tenderness for her.

But this was not right. This was not decent. Sin should not prosper so.

"How many men have you had, you whore!" he cried at her. "Answer me, you!"

She shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly, her eyes still busy with him, his words of insult glancing from her as spent arrows glance from armour. Moses realized that he could not touch her. How could one touch a being without a soul? And with the knowledge came the further realization that she did not know who he was but looked upon him simply as a man, any man, and yet, rough desert-dweller though he was, her eyes were angling for him. He knew that look now. It was not the sadness of mystery. It was the invitation to lust, the challenge of a woman who could never have enough of men, and whose fancy flitted from one to another as lightly and as casually as a jewelled humming-bird flits from flower to flower. It filled him with a sick disgust. Nor could he tell her who he was. That was, of all things, the hardest, not to be able to fling into her teeth that, in spite of her, he had survived, that he had prospered, that he was the chosen of Yahweh. No, he must remain Reuel, the desert chieftain. Why had Yahweh put this burden on him? Turning abruptly, he made for the entrance.

Tharbis glanced after him, wondering for an instant why he had stopped her and spoken to her and why his eyes had glared at her with such intensity. She couldn't recall ever having seen him before. Those eyes—they made a shiver run through her.

But then her mind returned to her own peculiar problem—how best to dramatize herself to the handsome young priest of Amon who had come down with Amenemhab from Thebes. Rumours about herself had, she gathered, come to his ears, and she took time to consider how unfair people always were to her. She could actually feel tears in her eyes at the thought of the injustices done her. That's what she would explain to the young priest—how people always misjudged her innocent actions and how a series of equally innocent but suspicious-seeming coincidences constantly overtook her. That usually worked.

That night, Aaron and Moses rode swiftly across the moon-filled plain towards Goshen. Moses knew that he ought to be thanking Yahweh in his heart, Yahweh who had made him to prevail against the Egyptians, and that he should be busy with plans. At his side Aaron was busy with plans. They must get the Hebrews away as quickly as possible, Aaron pointed out. Provisions would have to be got together. Possessions would have to be packed and got ready for carrying. There was the question, too, of whether to march by villages or by tribes.

As for himself, though his preparations were almost made, there would be a number of details to settle about his shops in Tanis. He would also have to get Jochebed, their mother, since she was by now crippled with rheumatism and would have to be carried in a litter. Yes, it would be a week at least before they could move.

Moses nodded abstractedly and ground his teeth together savagely. Tharbis! he was thinking. Whilst I was suffering she has slept soft. Aye, she has prospered. Even her beauty remains. Even now she sleeps in Merneptah's bed and suffers no harm. By Yahweh, the wicked should be made to suffer. Surely, it is Yahweh's will that she should suffer.

Yet he could not see any way to make her suffer. He had a mission, to lead the Hebrews out of bondage, and, by Yahweh, he assured himself, grinding his teeth, he would let nothing, not even the thought of Tharbis, turn him aside from that mission. That mission would take him out of Egypt, away from Tharbis forever. At this very moment he rode farther and farther away from her. For such was the will of Yahweh and such was the pact he had made with Yahweh under Sinai. Yet it was almost as shattering as death, now that he had seen Tharbis again, to abandon for always all thoughts of vengeance on her for that scorning of him twenty years ago. By Yahweh, it was not right. By Yahweh, she should have been made to suffer.

CHAPTER IV

THE Hebrews were almost ready to depart. There were many, indeed, who, at this last moment, preferred to remain in Egypt, since, when the final pinch came, they shrank from a world which they knew not and chose the evils that they knew. They gave gladly, however, to those who were going and the Egyptian neighbours round about, peasants like themselves, loaned to them what they wanted to borrow, and the Egyptian guards stood by sullenly, and Joshua and his young men were busy and all was bustling eagerness and confusion. "A three days' march," the Pharaoh's edict had read. But there was not a three-year-old among the Hebrews who could not have told you that once they left Egypt they would not ever return. For had not Yahweh through the lips of Moses, the Deliverer, and Aaron, his brother, promised that they would fare forth to Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey? Canaan, so far as most of them knew, was just across the border. A day's march, or two,

or at the most five or six and they would be in Canaan, the land prepared for them, a land, so it was bruited amongst them, which was a land of fat valleys and pleasant hills, a land where each man would have as many fields as he chose. There no one would beat them. There no one would fling a woman down casually and rape her, or wrench off a man's genitals or roast a village of people over slow fires or drive them off to labour under the hot sun whilst the whips of the overseers hissed and the sharpened stakes stood waiting in grisly wise for the tortured victims.

So they thought and the walls of Pithom ceased to rise and Moses smiled grimly, seeing them so happy and unknowing. But once they were in the desert there would be no escape. Once in the desert, Yahweh, the Lord God of Sinai would purge the softness and the corruptness of Egypt out of them and make them into a race worthy of Himself. His lip curled a little. For, in spite of himself, he had never entirely got over his ancient Egyptian scorn for the Hebrews as a whole nor could he think highly of a people who, taking them by and large, had not had the spirit to fight for themselves but for over forty years had endured to be treated like cattle and had not come to help his tribesmen at the Wall of the Princes because they expected freedom and comfort to fall into their laps like ripe fruit. Yet these were the people Yahweh had chosen to add to His flock. Who was he to question the wisdom of Yahweh?

He even, at moments, felt a measure of compassion for them. This did not, however, interfere with the grimness with which he drove them forward, seeing that, having put aside all thoughts of personal desires in comparison with his mission, he was determined that that mission should be completed. At his command, Joshua organized the young men into companies. Hur and Elkanah and Ittai and the other leaders were instructed to prepare the villages and to explain to them the ritual of the covenant with their new God, Yahweh, the Deliverer, which they must make before they set forth. And then word came that Aaron was on his way from Tanis with all his possessions and with Elisheba, his wife, and with Nadab and Abihu and Eleazar and Ithamar, their sons, and with the wives of Nadab and Abihu and their children; and that along with him he brought Jochebed, his mother, and Miriam, his sister.

Now Moses had not as yet seen his mother, and the same impatience which had led him to drive on the Hebrews in their preparations, impelled him to leave Goshen and to go out a two days' march to meet his brother. They were still a long way off, on the farther side of Bubastis when he saw them. Moses hastened

forward, his eyes eager on the dots of the caravan which seemed lost under the wide horizon. Vivid in his mind at this moment was the picture of Jochebed, the Jochebed whom he had known as a boy, the Jochebed who had come into his room at the dead of night when he was seven and from whom, though he had thought her only his nurse, had welled forth such a tide of affection that he had been touched and moved by it and had never quite forgotten it.

This was the expectation in his heart as he came riding up to the caravan. Aaron greeted him. From his side Miriam, who was now a gaunt-faced, soured spinster of fifty, gave him greetings with eyes that refused and mocked him. And then Aaron made to introduce to him his wife and his children and their wives and their children. But Moses said:

"Where is Jochebed, our mother?"

Aaron pointed along the line to a litter. Moses rode along to it and leaped down from his horse and went over. The woman lying in it looked up at him. For a moment there was no trace of recognition in her faded eyes or in her seamed and wrinkled face, so wrinkled that it looked like leather. But then, suddenly, she stretched up gnarled, quivering hands towards him, crying out:

"Moses! Moses, my son!"

He reached over and gathered her into his arms. He felt how thin and wasted and old her body was and the fingers that reached round the back of his neck had no strength or warmth in them, and the helpless tears of age were salt to his lips as he kissed her and her frame was shaken by the sick sobs of the aged and the helpless. Behind him Miriam's dry voice said:

"'Tis a wonder she knows you. For she knows no one else."

He said over his shoulder: "How long has she been like this? Why did not you tell me?"

"Did not Aaron say to you that Jochebed, our mother, was old?"

"Yes. But he did not say that she was like this. Else I would have come down to Tanis. Aye, even if it had been my death, I would have come down to Tanis."

"And that, I suppose," Miriam observed, "would have compensated for all the years when you were first Aahmose, Prince of Egypt and then Moses, chieftain of the Kenites, and Aaron your brother, and I—yes, I, your sister—looked after Amram, our father, and Jochebed, our mother. It is not that easy, Moses. It is Aaron who has fulfilled the duty of a son to her, not you. Where were you when the sickness of age seized her? Where were

you when she grew old and her mind wandered and she would hear Nadab's son toddling about the house and start and cry out: 'Moses!' I ask you, where were you?"

The sobbing had quieted now. Moses laid her gently back in the litter. But when he would have loosened his grasp, Jochebed's fingers clung to him with such a desperate urgency that he could not let her go. Nor had he words with which to meet Miriam's reproaches; for these were true. He knelt in the dust beside the litter and held his mother in his arms and saw himself not as the Deliverer, not as the mighty agent of Yahweh, but as a weak and feeble man, a man tossed like a chip on the tumultuous sea of his own desire and egotisms, a man whose life ran back like a thread in time to the womb of this old woman in his arms and stretched forward in the mists to—what? And then he heard Jochebed babbling. For with Jochebed, as is the way of the very old, the past and the present were now no longer separate but were merged so completely that at one moment she felt Moses, her son, in her arms, and knew that she was old and that Amram, her husband, was dead, and in the next she was back in her home in Memphis and Aaron and Miriam played around the fig tree in the courtyard and Moses was, as yet, heavy within her womb and she spoke to Amram of him and planned great things for him. For with the old the tyranny of time has lost its power and the mists cover the clear-cut outlines of things; the border between the visible and the invisible is lost so that it might seem that God prepared them for the knowledge that time and this world are both illusions and that all things, past, present, and future—the things we see and the things we sense and the things we do not know and can never know—are all but parts of one great whole so that, were we not animals, tied to the wheel of time and the tyranny of the obvious, we could step from one to the other, as lightly as a thought passes through a wall of stone or reaches from Sinai to Canaan and to Egypt and to Kush and below Kush while the body remains fast-rooted in the self-same place. So, at the moment, Jochebed was happy.

But Moses knelt in the dust and his mind thought bitterly once again that time takes away all things from men and women, even dignity. For who could see in this old woman, lost in the mists of her enfeebled mind, that Jochebed who had stood firm and resolute before the Princess Bint-Anath or had looked at him quietly when he was bad or whose dignified face had been full of calm power as she taught him his prayers to Yahweh. He said over his shoulder to Miriam:

"Yet, at least, it is I, not Aaron, who leads the Hebrews out of Egypt."

After a while, Jochebed fell asleep. Moses loosed himself and got up and they rode on. That day passed and the next and on the third they came to the outskirts of Goshen. Above them the sun beamed in a cloudless sky. Around them the green plain stretched away under the wide bowl of the encircling horizon. The barley and the wheat rippled in the breeze. The fat cattle looked up at them as they passed. The mud-brick villages of the Hebrews came into view. Moses, arousing from his reverie, began to consider the route by which he would lead the Hebrews out of Egypt and past the forts of the Wall of the Princes down into the wilderness to the Holy Mount that there he might present them unto Yahweh. In a day or two, at most, they should be ready to leave; the dust of Egypt would be shaken off their sandals.

He turned to Aaron to tell him. But Aaron was pointing to a dot on the road and said:

"One comes to meet us, riding fast."

They watched, speculating as to who it might be. Then it was evident that it was Joshua; and Moses, observing the urgency in his gait, wondered what problem might have arisen in his absence and thought vexedly that no matter what the trouble was, in these days it was brought to him for decision—which was, he reflected, part of the burden laid upon one who had made himself the leader of his people. But Joshua when he came up wasted no time in greeting.

"Turn back," he called when he was yet a short way off. "Turn back. Both of you."

Moses and Aaron stared at him. Joshua reined up his horse.

"The soldiers of the Pharaoh have come. Already the Sherden and the Nubians are in the villages. Already Elkanah writhes on a stake and Ittai hangs head downward over a fire of burning straw and death and outrage is visited on men and women. And the word is out, Aaron, to seize you and Moses, whom they know as Reuel, and to slay you."

"But the Pharaoh said he would let the Hebrews go!"

"His mind has changed. For now he says he will not let them go. Instead it is ordered that our tasks be doubled. The walls of Pithom are to rise with twice the speed. Moreover, it is commanded that the bricks be made without straw and that whensoever the tally of a man's bricks is not completed, then shall the child of that man be sealed in a jar and put into the wall to take the place of the bricks he should have made. We are worse off than before, O Chosen of Yahweh."

"By Yahweh, we will rise," Moses burst out. "By Yahweh, we will slay the soldiers."

Joshua looked at him with an expression of shame in his eyes.

"The people will not follow you," he said slowly.

"Not follow me? Not when their women are outraged and their leaders slain with torture?"

"No," Joshua said. "I have found that my father, Nun, is right. My young men will fight, if you give the word. But the mass of the Hebrews will not fight. They are slaves, not men. Each of them hopes that, if he submits and cringes, the vengeance and the punishment and the terror will fall upon his neighbour and not upon himself. Already they murmur against you and blame you, O Chosen of Yahweh. They say it is you who have brought this upon them. They say that you are a liar and a cheat and that Yahweh is but a false god, a god with no power in Egypt. If the common folk see you, they will give you up to the Egyptians. You must flee, you and Aaron. Flee to the desert. A band of my young men are ready. We will go with you to protect you."

Such anger filled Moses that he thought confusedly that he had never felt anger before. At his side Aaron was all a-tremble, already babbling of what they must do, of how swiftly they must flee. Through the mist which enveloped him Moses heard Miriam's satirical voice:

"So this is the end of the wondrous, the mighty Moses, who was Aahmoše, Prince of Egypt. Once again you will flee from Egypt like a whipped cur, and leave our people to their sufferings. What will it matter to you that, because of you, the iron harrow of suffering and torture will tear into the bodies of the Hebrews? For you will be safe in Sinai. Good-bye, brother Moses."

With a violent movement Moses wrenched his horse's head around. Aaron exclaimed:

"That is the wrong way to flee!"

"Flee!" Moses said. "I will not flee. I go back to the Pharaoh."

"But you will be slain. We will all be slain."

"Joshua will lead you to safety, to the edge of the desert about Goshen. I go back. And tell your people, the Hebrews, craven cowards though they be, that I will not desert them; nor shall Yahweh desert them. Tell them to make ready. For I go back to the Pharaoh. Yahweh will show me the way."

He kicked his horse with his heels. He went back along the road towards Bubastis. In her litter Jochebed reached out gnarled hands after him.

"Moses," she cried weakly. "Moses, my son."

But Moses did not hear her.

CHAPTER V

It had been brave words which he had spoken, there on the road from Bubastis. To say brave words, great words, and to bring them to accomplishment, was, he realized now that he was in Memphis, a different matter. It was true that to look for Reuel in Memphis, was a thing so outside probability or possibility that his very audacity made him safe. But safety was not the object of his return. Somehow, some way, he must face Merneptah, the Pharaoh, alone. But even to get in to see the Pharaoh was a problem. He went down to the palace. One could not get past the outer entrance without a written permission, and besides, were he to go in that way, recognition was almost certain. He hired a boat and drifted down the river to the palace. The walls were high and the entrances guarded. He began to evolve a desperate plan, that of disguising himself and of mingling on the next day of audience with the throng of supplicants and so getting by the guards at the entrance and into the Hall of Audience and then slaying the Pharaoh where he sat. That was not only a desperate chance but, in addition would be of no avail to his people, the Hebrews, his people who had believed in him and trusted him and for whom now that they were suffering, he had begun, curiously enough, to feel the same sort of affection as a shepherd feels for his sheep. The wolves were amongst his flock, tearing and ravishing. But he was helpless.

He prayed to Yahweh in his perplexity. Yahweh gave no sign, nor could he feel Him near him. And then one day as, unkempt and bitter and discouraged, he trudged along the road from the palace back towards Memphis, he saw a sedan chair coming towards him. Eight coal-black Nubians bore it. Its staves were of ebony shaped at each end into lotus flowers and inlaid with gold. The curtains around it were gaily striped. He wondered what beautiful, delicate woman of Egypt this litter might carry and glanced within as it came close to him. Then he stopped. He looked more sharply as it passed by. A withered old woman, sharp-featured as a hag, shrunken as a joint of meat from which the sun has dried out all the juice, looked back at him with black, snapping eyes, and he noticed for the first time the pennant which waved from the back of the carrying chair. With an exclamation he rushed after the litter.

"Stop," he ordered, striding alongside it.

The woman within looked at him again, this time in surprise.

"Stop, I say," Moses repeated. And then: "Don't you recognize me—Mother?"

The sharp features of the Princess Bint-Anath sharpened still further. She regarded him from head to heel. She looked deeply into his eyes. She laughed suddenly, a thin cackling laugh.

"Stop," she ordered the carriers. They stood still. She looked Moses over again. "After all these years," she said.

"Yes," Moses said. "After all these years—Mother."

"Yes, I was your mother, wasn't I? Or you thought I was. Do you know with whom your precious Tharbis sleeps now?"

"I know." Moses constrained himself. "You were right and I was wrong—Mother. She was not worthy to lick your sandals. I should have sent her back to Kush. Better that I should never have brought her thence."

"The years have brought you some sense, it seems. But why do you masquerade in that guise? Do you not know that Merneptah will kill you if he hears of you? If I tell him you are here, he will slay you."

"I know," Moses said, not troubling to explain that as Reuel Merneptah had already seen him but had not recognized him. He took his long chance. "I have come to take vengeance on Merneptah. It seems to me—Mother—that you and I have that much, at least, in common."

The old woman—for in these past seven years age had suddenly leaped out on Bint-Anath and struck her savagely—leaned back. There was a flash of fire in her eyes. Moses could not know it, but she was remembering the years of humiliation while Rameses yet lived: the snubs of her friends, the sneers of those who had always been jealous of her influence with her father, the complete loss of power, the triumph of Merneptah and Tiyy, Tiyy whom she had always hated. This whilom son of hers had been, in a large part, responsible for her overthrow. It would be sweet, a part of her thoughts told her, to play with him as a cat plays with a mouse, making him realize her power over him, at least, before she turned him over to the executioners. But there was more. There was Merneptah. Since he had become the Pharaoh, Merneptah had by no means forgotten the ancient enmity between them. Her villas had been taken from her. Her revenues had been decreased. At this moment she had been on her way to Merneptah to do what she loathed, to humiliate herself by pleading with him to let her at least retain her palace here at Memphis. Could she, she wondered swiftly, use this Moses to her advantage? She glanced at him again, not knowing that as Reuel he had already once stood before the Pharaoh. He was a

burly man, a vigorous man in the prime of middle life. There was a decision, too, and a fierceness in that bearded face which Aahmose, Prince of Egypt, had not had. It made her curious to learn what had happened to him in these twenty years. She said:

"We will go back to my palace. There we can talk."

It was strange to walk through the familiar pylons and up the familiar walk past the lily pools and along the well-known corridors, the slaves looking at him curiously, and into the familiar room. Nothing as yet in his return to Egypt had quite produced this sense of unreality as if, in reality, time had turned back and he were a boy again so that at any moment Imhotep, his tutor, might enter through the door or he might hear Jochebed's voice calling for Miriam outside the room. He had to look at Bint-Anath and at himself to make sure that it was not the same, and even then it was as if a boy of seven were looking at two strangers who had by some trick of fate come backwards in time to visit. "All is illusion," Ipuwer had said. That beam of sunlight stealing across the rug. How often had he watched that same beam travelling across that same rug. Was he a part of some strange dream, some figure in a shadow show which was being run backward, some part of a life which had been superimposed on some other life? Bint-Anath said:

"Now tell me about yourself."

He gathered together his faculties. He strove to remember who he was and for what he had come. He poured it forth. When he was done the Princess looked at him calculatingly. Age had done something to draw the venom from her, and to hear what had happened to this adopted son of hers because he had refused to be guided by her was, in a way, a bitter triumph. Had it been to her interest to sacrifice Moses, she would have done so without a second thought. Since it was not and since she thought that through him Merneptah might have some unpleasant moments and, perhaps, if she assessed the hate and the temper of this new Moses correctly, come upon his death, she allowed something of her once devouring affection for Moses to return to her.

"You wish to meet Merneptah—alone?" she asked.

"Yes. But that does not seem possible. The guards——"

"You say you have a boat, that you can go down by the river?"

"Yes."

Bint-Anath picked up a mirror thoughtfully and seeing her features in it, laid it down hastily. "There is a secret entrance in the wall facing the river," she observed reflectively. "It is

not used now. I think it is forgotten. Through it, years ago, I used to go to visit my father, Rameses the Great."

"Mother!"

"If I were to give you the key——"

"Give me the key—Mother. I will be grateful to you forever."

Bint-Anath smiled, a secret smile. She got up and went to a carven chest of cedar. She opened it. It was filled with gowns, gowns that she had worn when she was beautiful. She fumbled under them with a wry distaste. At the very bottom she found it. Turning, she held it out to Moses. He seized it, his eyes ablaze. And if he is killed, too, but only after he had slain Merneptah, the Princess thought wisely, then all accounts will be balanced . . . all accounts except Tharbis, the slut. And, perhaps, if Merneptah is slain, even Tharbis—yes, even Tharbis . . . Her nostrils flared wide.

He had waited until the shadows of the night might cover him. No one had seen him as he landed quietly under the palms and disembarked and tied up his boat. No one perceived him as he stole through the trees to the very back of the palace and came upon the path, now overgrown with shrubs, and found, set low in the wall and joined so cleverly that it was almost indiscernible, the postern gate which Bint-Anath had once used to visit Rameses the Great. It took a little time to open. He closed it behind him carefully, not locking it, and found himself in the walled-in secret passage which Bint-Anath had described and which, she had said, led through and along the wall directly to the bedroom of the Pharaoh. Moses wondered briefly what he would do if a woman were in bed with the Pharaoh—or, perhaps, even, Tharbis. He did not know what he would do. That much he must leave to Yahweh, and, as for himself, he had put Tharbis behind him. Carefully he felt his way along the low passage and reached the end of it. He turned to the right. Here, if Bint-Anath were right, a section of the wall should swing outward when he pressed down a catch.

He found the catch. He pressed it down. Light appeared. Moses stepped through, and the wall closed behind him. Merneptah, not yet quite ready for bed, had his back to him, examining a set of erotic paintings, limned vividly on wood with all the skill of Egypt. So absorbed was he that Moses, dagger in his hand, was able to come up behind him without being observed. Before he spoke Moses glanced around him swiftly. There was only one other entrance into this room, one which opened into an ante-room—and the ante-room, too, was empty. There would be guards outside the ante-room. But Moses was

counting on the sudden materialization of himself out of nowhere, so far as Merneptah's thinking would go, to hold him speechless and terror-stricken. He said:

"Merneptah."

The Pharaoh jumped like a horse stung on the rump by a bee, and turned around. When he saw before him, materialized out of thin air, so far as he could comprehend—for his startled brain told him that no one could have got past the guards—the man of the desert who had faced him three weeks ago in his private room of audience, he let the pictures drop with a clatter, his mouth gaping open.

"If you cry out for the guards, by Yahweh, I will kill you," Moses said, watching him closely.

"But now—where——" Merneptah gasped.

"Through the wall," Moses answered, smiling strangely.

Merneptah accepted the statement literally. Part of his startled brain told him that he had been right, that he had felt a strange power in this man of the desert three weeks ago. And, lo, now this man had come to him through the solid walls of the palace. What could one do against one with such supernatural powers? He wished violently that in the matter of the Hebrews he had not let Sabu overpersuade him.

"Why have you come?" he stammered. "Who has sent you."

Moses frowned at him sternly.

"The God of Sinai hath sent me," he said. "He bids me to ask you why you have not let His people go. He bids me ask you why His vengeance should not fall upon you."

"It was—Sabu—not—I," Merneptah stammered. "Let the God of Sinai take His vengeance on Sabu, not on me."

"Did I not warn you that the God of Sinai was angry with Egypt? Did I not tell you that, unless you let His people go, God would send plagues upon you?"

"Yes, but——" Merneptah broke off. For Moses, putting all his power into the eyes with which he held Merneptah, had willed him to silence. And then, taking a step forward, he put illusion upon him. Before his eyes Merneptah saw not Moses nor the wall of the room but the sky filled with locusts, and the Nile red with blood and hail beating down the ripening wheat and a pestilence lowering in the sky. And behind it all lowered the frowning, the awful brows of the God of Sinai. A sweat broke out on the Pharaoh's brow as he saw that frown and suddenly beheld his son, his son whom he loved, stretched on a bed of death whilst around him wailed the women. He could hear their wailing in his ears.

"What must I do?" he asked. "Tell me what I must do."

"Let my people go. Thus saith the God of Sinai."

"I will let them go," the Pharaoh babbled. "And Sabu shall not overpersuade me. I swear it. By Amon and by Ptah and by Osiris and by the homeless homes of the dead, I swear it. Only let the God of Sinai spare me. Let Him spare my son. I swear it."

Moses pointed to the table against the wall. There was papyrus and a pen and ink upon it.

"Write the order," he commanded. "Write it to your captains in Goshen. Write it in such terms that they dare not disobey."

Merneptah stumbled over to the table. He wrote. He signed the order and sealed it tremblingly with the great seal of the Pharaoh and held it out to Moses. Moses took it.

"And will you once again in your folly, Merneptah, Pharaoh of Egypt, defy the God of Sinai?" he wanted to know.

"Nay, I swear it. By my own godhead and my hope that at some time I shall pass safely through the judgment hall of Osiris in the West to the abodes of the blessed, I swear it."

Moses cut his babbling short. It was in his mind that he would like to tell Merneptah who he was. It was also in his mind to slay him. But either of these actions would have jeopardized the success he had won. No, for the sake of the Hebrews, he must refrain and depart as he had come, even though half of the sweetness of his triumph was lost, if Merneptah did not know who he was.

"See that you keep your oath," he said sternly. "Else will the God of Sinai send me again to you through the solid wall to take vengeance upon you. Aye, sleeping and waking, alone or in the midst of your guards you will not be safe from His vengeance. For He moveth on the face of the water and through the subtle air and no man can judge or see His going. You may be Pharaoh of Egypt, Merneptah. To the God of Sinai you are less than the dust which the wind scattereth over the plain."

Merneptah started to babble again. Moses raised his hand. It was in his mind to send Merneptah to the outer room so that he would not see him vanish but might still think him possessed of powers beyond the power of mortal man. He heard a sound and turned to look. Inevitably, as in a play, there was Tharbis coming through the outer room, Tharbis arrayed for the bed of Merneptah in a gauzy mist through which every outline, every detail of her voluptuous woman's body could be clearly seen. The savage thought flashed into Moses' mind that she showed no surprise to see another man with the Pharaoh and this thought put other thoughts in his mind, thoughts and pictures which drove him almost out of himself. To leave her, his wife,

with Merneptah? To let her go unpunished? By Yahweh, he could not do it. By Yahweh, he was less than a man if he left her.

"This woman," he exclaimed hoarsely, "this woman comes with me."

Merneptah gaped at him. "This woman?" he asked in surprise.

Moses was beyond caution. He forgot the Hebrews. He forgot his oath to Yahweh under Sinai. He forgot all but that this was Tharbis, flung by accident, nay, by the will of Yahweh, across his path again.

"Yes, this woman," he said.

Merneptah's mouth closed. There was a flicker of suspicion in the bulging eyes which a moment ago had been filled only with fear and apprehension.

"Hath the God of Sinai also need of her?"

Moses started to say "Yes." But he was checked. To say that, he realized sharply, would be blasphemy. The God of Sinai was not like ithy-phallic Min. He needed no woman and the relationship between men and women was, so Moses had believed ever since that night when he had come upon Barak and Zipporah, impure in His eyes. He paused, at a loss, and Merneptah's brain began to work. This man might have supernatural powers. He might have been sent by the God of Sinai. How else could he have come through the wall? But he was a man, as well, not a demon as Merneptah in his panic had believed. With a man there were ways of dealing, and there was, too, he realized a third time, something familiar about this face. He opened his mouth to speak—and there was a shouting at the door. Moses came back to himself. He raised his dagger.

"Bid them not to enter," he ordered.

After one glance at his face Merneptah obeyed.

"But I must see you, Ruler-of-the-Two-Lands," the voice of Sabu shouted. "For I have news, terrible news."

"Bid him shout it through the doorway," Moses commanded. Merneptah once more obeyed.

"The Peoples of the Sea and the Tehenu have marched into Egypt," the Vizier called in through the entrance. "Forward they march towards Memphis, and, as they march, they slay and burn. The canals are red with blood. The air is darkened with their arrows as with the locust-swarm. In the villages and the cities the first-born of Egypt are tossed on the spear points. Swiftly must the army of Egypt be gathered, O Mighty One. Else is Egypt lost."

Merneptah gaped at Moses. Moses stared back at him, a fiercely exultant smile on his bearded lips, his mind swooping

up in exaltation until he was beyond himself. Verily Yahweh had not failed him. Verily, the plagues which he had promised would fall upon Egypt had come, aye, even now were smiting the Egyptians. Tharbis, aye, even Tharbis was part of Yahweh's will. At this instant he had no doubt of it.

"And your son, Merneptah, Pharaoh of Egypt?" he questioned grimly.

"No. Not that! Not that!"

"Then, this woman?"

"Take her. Do you what you will with her. I must assemble the army of Egypt."

"And I," Moses said strongly, completely carried away by his exultation, so that he no longer cared what he said or did. "I go back to Goshen to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt. Farewell, Merneptah. Moses, who was Aahmose, Prince of Egypt, bids you farewell."

"Moses!" So that was why he had thought the eyes familiar! Yet it was not possible. "But," Merneptah stammered, "but were you not Reuel when you spoke to me?"

"Reuel or Moses, it is all one. I, Moses, take Tharbis back from you, Merneptah."

A dull gleam of anger began to appear in Merneptah's eyes. But at that moment Sabu, the vizier, called out again, and Merneptah remembered the Tehenu and the Peoples of the Sea. He paused, indecisive.

"Go," Moses said. "Go out to him."

As Merneptah went, turning, Moses opened the section of the wall. Tharbis, in whom comprehension of this amazing scene was just beginning to dawn, started to scream. Moses clapped his hand over her mouth. She bit it, struggling. With a fierce oath he dragged her through the wall and into the secret passageway. The wall swung to behind them. Releasing her, he struck her.

"Now, will you come quietly?" he snarled at her in the darkness.

She was frightened. What mind she had was whirling under the impact of these sudden, these astounding happenings. Moses, this bearded man—Merneptah letting her go—this strange, dark passageway—but, most of all, Moses. She was frightened of Moses. She was panic-stricken. Afraid even to sob, she let Moses lead her out through the passageway and across the garden and into the boat. Moses began to pull strongly across the river to the spot where he had a horse tethered. Crouched down in a heap, Tharbis began to gather herself together. All she could realize was that this was complete disaster, that, somehow, out

of the past Moses, whom she had forgotten, had returned to claim her. And she was afraid of him, this grim-faced Moses.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked in a whisper.

"What is that to you, you slut?"

"Where are you taking me?" she demanded, starting to get up, her voice beginning to rise hysterically. "What are you going to do with me? What——?"

She saw the dull gleam of the dagger in Moses' hand as he stopped rowing and, putting the back of her hand to her mouth, sank back again. Moses picked up the oars.

"It wasn't my fault," she whimpered hysterically. "I couldn't help it."

"Slut!" he hissed at her and pulled at the oars so savagely that her head was snapped back. Tharbis said nothing more. The passion in Moses' voice had awakened her intuition. Her intuition told her that it was better, at present, to keep quiet. For her intuition had told her something more. This man might think he hated her. But behind the hatred in Moses' voice was something else, something that Tharbis was a past mistress in divining and using. It was that something which made her less afraid. So long as there was that something in his voice she would know what to do. She relaxed a little. Her mind began to function. Goshen, this man had said. Goshen was still in Egypt. She might escape; or, even, by the power of desire, get this man to pity her and let her go. Besides, Merneptah, so her intuition told her, once he came to his senses, would not let her go so easily. She relaxed still more. The main thing for the moment was this man. How best to handle him?

"I always did love you, Moses," she said softly to the figure at the other end of the boat. "I never forgot you, no, never."

Moses grunted. He gave a savage pull at the oars. Tharbis smiled in the darkness. Her fingers went to her hair, arranging it.

"It wasn't my fault," she whispered in the darkness. "Think, Moses. I was just a girl, an inexperienced girl. How could I have known what was happening, twenty years ago? You didn't have time to explain it to me, really explain it. I thought it was just a temporary thing, something that would pass, that you would be back again. I thought that you were the grandson of the Pharaoh. I had no idea of anything. How could I, a girl just come from Kush, realize that to be a Hebrew was so terrible, that it would cut you off completely? I thought you would be back."

Moses grunted again. Tharbis leaned back more comfortably.

"I waited for you," she whispered. "You didn't come back. You never sent me word. I thought you must be dead; or that

you had forgotten me. And then"—she leaned forward—"then what was I to do? I was alone—a girl—alone in Egypt, in a strange land. What was I to do? I never forgot you, Moses. What I did, I did because I had to. If you had only sent word to me."

He pulled away stubbornly at the oars. The trouble was that he could see that what she was saying might sound reasonable. It might have been that way. And the trouble was that it was just what he would like to believe. Not that he would forgive her, he assured himself hastily. No, reasonable or not, he was, after all, sure as to what she was like. Turning on her heel, there in Avaris. "Our times together were lovely, Moses. But they are over now." Looking at him, with inviting eyes a few short days ago when she had thought that he was a stranger. Coming to Merneptah's bed, arrayed voluptuously—as she was arrayed now.

And meanwhile Tharbis had reflected that except for Merneptah and except, perhaps, for rumours, Moses could not possibly know about her other men.

"I've made mistakes," she sighed. "I can never seem to understand that people will put the wrong construction on the most innocent actions. I like men. I admit it. I like to be vivacious, to attract their attention, to feel that they admire me. But that is all, Moses. By all the gods, I swear that is all. Except for Merneptah. I couldn't help that. I'll take any oath you like, Moses."

It was again what he would have liked to believe. And what, in any event, now that he had her, was he going to do with her? He had planned to punish her. But how?

In savage uncertainty he reached the bank, beached the boat under a thicket, and turned to help Tharbis out. She took his hand and, stepping out, seemed to trip over a root. She fell against him and instinctively he caught her. He could smell the perfume of her, feel the voluptuous softness of her.

"Your wife, Moses," she sighed.

This, he thought suddenly, this would be the way to punish her, to take her and then, scornfully, when he was tired of her, to send her back. His arms tightened about her.

CHAPTER VI

THERE was so much to do, even yet, and so little time in which to do it. For, once he was away from Memphis and back in Goshen, Moses realized bitterly the two errors he had made. Had

he left the Pharaoh in doubt as to who he was and from whence he had come and had he not taken Tharbis away with him, the mystery and the fear of him would have remained with Merneptah. Now, however, knowing that he was not Reuel but Moses and a man, so truly a man that he had dragged Tharbis with him, there would only be so much time granted the Hebrews as there was danger to Egypt from the Tehenu and the Peoples of the Sea.

Yet that danger, at least, was real. All the reports that came to Goshen told of it. Sais had fallen. Buto had fallen. The hordes of the invader were like the engulfing sea. They were advancing on Memphis, it was said, and from all the Northland and the Southland as far as he could reach, the Pharaoh was hastily assembling his host to meet them. So it was that the soldiers of Egypt marched away from Goshen. And so it was that Aaron and Moses were given a free hand to organize the migration.

But when a man tries to move a people from the land in which most of them have lived for centuries, he comes upon confusion. Joshua and his groups of young men did their best. The elders in every village tried to make their people ready for the great removal. Everywhere there was hope and disorder. Everywhere the women were loading themselves with jewellery and clothing and with pots and jars, both what they owned and what they could beg or borrow, as before.

Moses knew that much of this was useless, just as he knew that for the men to pack and load their sticks of furniture was also useless. In the wilderness a man must travel light; but he could not tell the people so. To have told them so would have been to discourage them.

Yet it all took time. Even after the feast of the covenant had been celebrated it took further time to assemble the host from all of Goshen to Kés, whence the march was to be started. At last it was done. That evening in the town of Kes and in the fields around the low hill on which the town stood a great multitude was encamped. From the topmost steps of the temple of Ra, which was the centre of the town and which had been taken over by Moses for himself and his leaders, he looked over his people. The sun was not yet set. In the crooked twisting streets below him there was indescribable confusion, the lowing of cattle, the bleating of flocks, the shouts and curses of men, the voices of women calling out for their children. On the plain around the town the scene was repeated many times. It was like a great fair; only unlike a fair there was scarcely a semblance of order. How would he ever get this mob on the march tomorrow? Moses

wondered despairingly. Yet he must get them on the march. The news had come that shortly the Pharaoh would join battle with the Tehenu and the Peoples of the Sea. Perhaps the barbarians would conquer. He hoped that the barbarians would conquer, and yet, in a way, he hoped that they would not. To think of Memphis under the rough feet of the Peoples of the Sea was a pang to him. And yet, if the barbarians did not conquer, then, Merneptah, turning his thoughts again to the Hebrews, would repent that he had let them go. No, this host must be moved on the morrow.

He turned and went inside the temple. Aaron was there and Joshua, and so were Nun and Hur and all the elders of the Hebrews. Moses looked at them. In this moment when he should have been filled with exaltation because on the morrow the dream that he had dreamed, the vision which he had visioned, would begin to be fulfilled, he knew only a weariness and a sinking of his heart. For he had sinned with Tharbis. He felt within himself now that to take a woman such as she, a woman to whom any man was an excitement and one who in these years had learned to practice and delight in all the eroticisms of Egypt, was a sin. To desire her, knowing what she was, was a still greater sin. Yet he could not forbear to desire her. Yes, though Aaron looked at him strangely and Miriam's lips were a bitter sneer, and though Yahweh, he was convinced, frowned on him, he still desired her. He had thought to send her back. He had found that he could not send her back. After all, he asked himself a thousand times, might not Tharbis be telling the truth? She swore that she loved him. She had taken an oath by the gods of Egypt and by the gods of Kush, in whom he knew she still believed with a certain degree of superstitious awe, that there had been no other man except Merneptah and that Merneptah had shared her couch only because there was no other protection for her. Surely a man could believe such oaths. Was he not doing her an injustice.

It was this last question which troubled Moses and all the more so because he wanted to believe what Tharbis told him. If this were the truth, his egotism was restored and his humiliation at her hands was healed.

Yet he could not feel sure. For just when, overcome by the ecstasy of her, he would say to himself: "Yes, she speaks the truth," some word or some action of hers would let him look into her real self. Even here, in Goshen, she had eyes for men. She would remember and look quickly at Moses and laugh and say: "You like to see your wife admired, don't you, Moses?" But that act in itself would recall to Moses the days in Avaris and

what Sinuhe had said of her, and he would stand off and see her as he would have judged any other woman who acted, or had acted as she had. In that moment, he would know that she was perjured, that she was worthless, with no thoughts of anyone except of herself. Yet his emotion warred so strongly with his reason that he could not feel sure.

Such doubt is distracting for a leader. It was with a start that Moses realized that he was sitting in his place and that they were all waiting for him to speak. With an effort he put Tharbis from his mind and turned to the matter in hand, arrangements for the beginning of the march on the morrow. Almost immediately he encountered a difficulty.

"We have forgotten one thing," Hur pointed out. "We have forgotten the body of Joseph-el."

Moses looked at him. He had no particular fondness for this long melancholy man with the sanctimonious face and the nose perpetually dripping rheum. He had noticed, however, that Miriam seemed to find much in common with him.

"Joseph, who brought us up to Egypt," Hur explained. His voice took on a pious note. "His tomb is three leagues from here. It is well known among us that, unless we take the body of Joseph-el with us, we cannot prosper."

It was in Moses' mind to tell Hur that, unless they got themselves quickly out of the reach of the Pharaoh, they would not prosper either. But he had heard a murmur of assent and he had by this time learned that it was a touchy business to interfere with the religious beliefs and prejudices of a people.

"We had planned to start tomorrow," he pointed out.

"One day will not make much difference," a new voice argued. It was Reuben, a stalwart, handsome man in his middle thirties and a man, Moses had come to realize in the last few days, with a mind of his own. Moses, in fact, watching and estimating people as a leader must, in terms of possible rivalry to himself, had already decided that he would do well to keep an eye on Reuben. It was clear, however, that this was not the incident on which to challenge him.

"We can spend the day in organizing the people for the march," Hur suggested.

"So be it," Moses said. "Send for the body of Joseph-el. But remember," he got up from his seat, "remember, on the day after tomorrow we must start."

"Hadr't we better discuss the organization of the people now?" Reuben inquired.

Moses fought down his temper. "Joshua will see to it," he said shortly. "Do you, Reuben, and you, Hur, and the rest of

you, give aid to Joshua. In Joshua is all my confidence." He was repaid by the look of devotion in Joshua's eyes.

Yet even on the second day they were late in starting, so that it was almost noon before the host was on its way, following the line of the canal to Succoth. It was a motley host. Moses rode along the line of it, shaking his head. These people ambled along as if they were going on a holiday and not on a stern journey into the wilderness to meet their God. He frowned at the donkeys piled high with jars and pots and furnishings and hutches of rabbits and chickens in coops and bedding tied up with string and a thousand and one useless things. He scowled at the women, laden down with necklaces strung out of rolled gold, and with circlets of gold and silver around their arms and ankles and with ornaments hung from ears and noses and with bags of henna pods thrust between their breasts. He pursed his lips at the men leading a goat by the ear or pulling along a heifer by a rope. They were, indeed, arranged roughly by villages. Yet even so, as the march progressed, they would be strung out interminably. He rode back and found Joshua.

"Take a company of your young men," he ordered. "Go to the rear of the column. See that the stragglers are not left behind. See to it, in fact, that the host does not straggle."

It was impossible, however, to hurry along that column of men and women and children and goats and sheep and donkeys. When the swift Egyptian dusk started to fall, though the vanguard was approaching Succoth, the main mass stretched back into the darkness, and Moses realized that, now that they were weary, the children crying, the women irritable, the men cursing, Joshua's company would not be enough to hold the host together. So he thought of another device, a device which the Kenites practised on the march. He had burning braziers lit and lifted on poles and placed between the villages so that the flames from them might guide them and keep each village together. Thus, at last, long after nightfall, they came to Succoth.

It was a weary business settling for the night in the darkness. Joshua's young men were kept busy. Quarrels broke out and children were lost and women went hunting for them, and there was sickness, and cattle and sheep and goats and donkeys wandering in and out, whilst above their heads towered the half-built walls of Pithom.

The sight of them should have inspired the Hebrews and reminded them that a fortnight ago they had been labouring on those walls, the whips of the overseers lashing down, the hoarse cries of their taskmasters resounding in their ears and, over to the left, the stakes of impalement waiting. Some of them

may have felt this, or may have remembered that a child of theirs, sealed in a jar, had been put into those walls in place of the tally of bricks they had not been able to complete.

Most of them, however, were too weary and too confused. They flung up tents and shelters and lean-to's hurriedly so as to get their families under cover and to feel something of that sense of security which a roof brings to mortals. The women baked cakes of unleavened bread. They swallowed them. They lay down to sleep. But all through the host was the thought: tomorrow, Canaan. Or, at least the day after tomorrow—Canaan.

It was much later that night that Moses, the preparation and plans for the next day at last completed, came out and walked alone in the darkness among the sleeping host. The water of the deep canal was silver in the half-moon. The walls of Pithom rose up blackly. Underneath as far as his eyes could see was stretched the sleeping host and the black lumps of their flocks and herds. As he threaded his way amongst them, hearing here the tired wail of a child, and there the rough accents of a man and the soft submissive note in a woman's voice as she answered him, Moses was once again, as in Memphis, impressed deeply by the thought that these people had been put into his care. In Goshen they had been a people to win over, to subdue and convert by persuasion. He had been conscious of imposing his will upon them by his own strength, of rousing them to move along the path which he had chosen for them, believing it to be the path marked out by Yahweh. Now that they were uprooted, however, and were thus put completely into his hands, he began to find within him a great tenderness for them. For men and women were helpless. They believed easily. They could be moved, as Ipuwer had once suggested, by an idea, true or false, so long as one honeyed it with religion.

Moses, of course, felt that his own idea was true. But he realized that he was leading these helpless people into the wilderness. Who knew what might happen to them? Under Yahweh, he resolved, looking around at them and remembering resentfully his own weakness with Tharbis, under Yahweh, he would make these slaves, these cowards, into a nation, a tough, a stiff-necked nation, one that would do glory to Yahweh, one that could be flung up against the eternal stars and across the mighty seas and into faraway lands and still remain a people apart, one that could be stamped on with ruthless feet and ground by the mills of oppression and still rise up, resurgent. Joshua would help him. Yes, Joshua, not Aaron, was the man on whom he must depend.

He turned back to his tent, knowing that Tharbis awaited him there. Was it a spell she had flung over him, some evil spell of Egypt? He did not know. But he resolved deeply, that, even if he did not know what to do with Tharbis and whether to believe her or not, he would not fail this people which Yahweh had entrusted to him. In spite of his own weakness, they should come first. Tomorrow they would reach and cross the Wall of the Princes. Then, they would be in the wilderness. And then he would have time to reflect what to do with Tharbis.

CHAPTER VII

THE next night the host was not in the wilderness. For when they came to the fort of the Wall of the Princes the captain refused to let them through. Moses could not risk his people in battle. He turned to the southward to circle round the forts and proceed north between them and the lakes until they reached the bridge of land between Egypt and the peninsula. That night he did not sleep. For, just after the host had encamped by the first of the lakes, the Lake of the Crocodiles, Elihun, whom he had left at Bubastis to bring him word, came to him with news. Moses listened. At Perire, Elihun told him, the host of Egypt had met the hordes of the Tehenu and the Peoples of the Sea among the vineyards and the grain fields. For six hours the battle had swayed this way and that. Then the archers of Egypt had turned the tide and the barbarians had broken and Merneptah had pursued them with his chariots to the Mount of the Horns of the Earth. Thousands had been slain. Great booty had been captured. And now Merneptah, with six hundred of his chariots, was galloping across the Northland to Goshen in pursuit of the Hebrews.

It was what Moses had feared, the reason why the sense of time passing had weighed on him. His regret for the day wasted in getting the body of Joseph-el was bitter. Now that the danger was real, however, he kept the news to himself, except for Joshua. To Joshua he gave instructions to pick out four thousand of the best-armed and bravest of his young men, and to add them to his company to march with them in the rear. As for his other leaders—Aaron and Nun and Hur and Reuben and also Miriam, to whom he had assigned the task of organizing the head women of each village into a band—he called them together and explained to them that by the next day they must have crossed over into Sinai, since otherwise, as he observed, dissembling, there would

be those who would grow weary and want to turn back. So he commanded an early start for the morning.

This was all he could do and all he dared do. To tell these people who had so lately been slaves that the army of Egypt was hurrying to overtake them would have been to produce in them a panic and a confusion which would have been fatal. This was a fear and a burden which must be borne alone. He went out into the darkness. The night was very still, abnormally still, and the heat seemed to press down under a veil of sullen clouds. He passed through the sleeping host and came to the waters of the lake. It shimmered dully, repellently, like molten lead. There was not a breath of air and the stars were hidden. Moses gazed northward. The one hope, the only hope was to reach the head of this lake, get past the lakes above it and turn eastward before the chariots of the Egyptians should overtake them. Would the God of Sinai aid them? he wondered. Or had his sin with Tharbis found him out? He thought that he would pray to the God of Sinai. It seemed, however, that no prayers would come.

He went back towards his tent, and Nun, observing him from the hollow in which he lay, thought that there was something tragic in his bowed head and dragging steps. Nun did not understand all that was happening to Moses but he was acute enough to connect the change in him with the woman he had brought back from Memphis. Before that time Nun had seen in Moses a man so absorbed in his one and single purpose, so convinced of its rightness, so successful in imposing his will, that he had towered like a giant among the Hebrews. And there had been no doubt in Nun's mind that Moses would, in some fashion, lead the Hebrews out of Egypt.

Since the coming of Tharbis, however, there had been an air of uncertainty lurking about Moses, an abstractedness, as if his mind were constantly on something else, which augured ill for his leadership. That this was linked with some inner struggle about the woman who had been his wife in his Egyptian days seemed evident to Nun, and he reflected that it was ironic that, just when Moses was about to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt, Egypt, in the person of Tharbis, should lay fingers on him again.

Still, that problem, whatever it might be, was Moses' concern, not his. Nun rolled over, realizing the stifling heat, the still dead air. He thought of Joshua, his son, so happy in his work and his importance, so devoted to Moses, so free from any questionings. He thought, too, of the Hebrews in the wilderness, since to Nun, who knew where Canaan was situated and that it was thickly inhabited by well-organized peoples who were under the aegis of

Egypt, it was obvious that Moses did not intend, and had never intended, to lead the Hebrews thither. He wondered a little about the urgency in Moses' manner when he had spoken to them all that evening about the morrow's march. But his mind returned to Tharbis, remembering her as he had seen her since Memphis. It was fortunate, he told himself with a dry chuckle, that he was an old man, past the age for interest in women. Otherwise, with that shape and that manner, he, too, like Reuben and a half-dozen others, might be rutting around her. No, he did not envy Moses.

And meantime, Moses, coming to the door of his tent, which was pitched by the Tent of Meeting, found Aaron waiting for him. As soon as he saw him Moses knew that his brother had smelled out the truth. It was in the odour of fear about him, the agitated manner, the trembling voice.

"Well?" Moses said impatiently.

"The Pharaoh!" Aaron stammered out, his teeth chattering. "We must flee, Moses. We must take our families and flee."

"Elihun should not have told you."

"He thought I had been told. And I should have been told, I, your brother."

"Well, so you know. Get back to your tent."

"What! You do not mean——"

"Yes, I do mean. I shall not flee."

"What good can you do, can either of us do?" Aaron made brief violent gestures in the darkness. "Six hundred chariots. The Pharaoh can chop the Hebrews to mincemeat if he wills. He will not do that. After he has slain a few, he will drive the rest back to Goshen, there to labour for him once more. But as for us and our families, there will be no mercy for us, Moses. Death! Torture! Be sensible, Moses. We cannot stop the Pharaoh. Let us take our families and go. The host will not know until morning that we have gone."

Moses looked at his brother. He had many admirable qualities, this brother of his; eloquence, the ability to organize, a consuming love of his people, yes, in spite of his present words, a love for his people. There was much, too, Moses realized, in what he had said. But there was one thing which he did not comprehend and which Moses himself had scarcely comprehended until this crisis had been thrust upon him.

"Look," Moses invited him, gesturing with his hand towards the sleeping host. Aaron looked. He saw the vague humps under the stars, heard the little sounds that came from it, a baby crying, the shout of a man as a goat stumbled over him, the bray of a donkey, the bleat of a sheep. "Those people have entrusted

themselves to us," Moses went on. "They have chosen us to be their leaders. Will you leave them, leaderless, to face the Pharaoh, Aaron?"

Aaron swallowed. "Why not? It is not only ourselves—on stakes—writhing. There are our families, my wife, your wife, that Kushite woman—their breasts cut off——"

Moses checked him with an abrupt gesture. His voice was rough. "When a man sets himself up to be a leader, Aaron," he stated, "he abdicates part of his freedom. Human fears are no longer his privilege. He and his family must accept the penalties of defeat as well as the glories of triumph."

"Then I will go," Aaron babbled. "You can stay if you like. But I will go."

"I will not permit you."

"Not permit me?"

"No, Aaron. Tonight our case seems desperate. But who knows what tomorrow may bring? Tomorrow, Aaron, we shall either save the Hebrews or perish with them. So, I shall not permit you to go."

Aaron thought within himself, snarlingly, that from the first this had been Moses' chariot, not his, and that he had been an unwilling passenger. But he knew inflexibility when he met it. He turned to go.

"I have given orders to Joshua," Moses called after him. "No one is to leave the camp."

Within the tent Tharbis, her ear pressed to the wall, had heard every word that had been spoken. It was her first knowledge that Merneptah was in pursuit. A wild, an almost uncontrollable delight seized her. Six hundred chariots! Aid on the morrow! By all the gods of Kush, she thought vindictively as she hurried back to her couch, when Moses is captured I will beg him from Merneptah. Merneptah may think that he knows how to torture. Wait till he has seen what I will do to Moses.

As Moses came into the tent she spoke to him.

"Darling," she whispered softly, "is it you—at last?"

CHAPTER VIII

BEFORE daylight—a daylight that was long in coming—the Hebrews were on the move. They grumbled as the leaders woke them. They grumbled as the young men went amongst them, hurrying them at their morning meal, insisting that they fall into columns and begin the march. Why the haste? they grumbled.

Had they flung off their Egyptian taskmasters only to find new ones? Nor was it a morning for marching. It was too hot, a dry heat that oppressed one and the high, leaden pall of cloud gave no relief. Nor was there a breath of air to cool a man.

At last, however, in spite of their complaining they were on the move. Moses rode up and down the column, irritated at their slowness, trying to hurry them on. As daylight began to struggle through the pall of cloud he found himself glancing back over his shoulder. He forced himself not to. No hint of danger must be given to the Hebrews. Else, undisciplined as they were, they would break and scatter in panic.

But he cursed their slowness. He fumed at the women and the children and at all the useless bundles and baggage which slowed down the march. He tried to wipe sweat from his forehead and found that he could not. It was then that he realized the abnormality of the day, after the unusual heat and stillness of the night. Though the sun was up the air remained heavy and lifeless, and the light was so muted under the pall of cloud that it seemed as if the Hebrews marched in some non-existent land to some non-existent goal, and on the horizon the sky gleamed dully as if some painter had brushed it with a streak of burnished copper.

He had no time, however, to be impressed by this. It was his task to hurry his people along. He glanced back. Joshua had his young men in military formation. But there was no sign. Pray Yahweh, there would be no sign.

The long column straggled northward with only the briefest of halts—a procession of ants under a lowering, brooding sky. Noon passed. On their right the Lake of Crocodiles had given way to another lake, a long, low, marshy lake, the Sea of Reeds. Still there was no sign behind them. If they could pass beyond the Sea of Reeds, Moses reflected, they could turn and cross over into Sinai. The Hebrews were grumbling more openly now. They could not understand why they should not pause for their midday meal. Some of them began to halt, to fall out from the column. Moses rode up to them. With angry words and blows, he forced them back into line. He got them going again. He paused, wiping off his cheek, noticing that though the light was increasing it had a curious steely colour to it. It was then that he felt a touch on his arm. He turned. Joshua was beside him and Joshua pointed back silently to the way by which they had come. Moses followed the pointing finger. There, in the distance, was a pillar of dust.

Moses drew in his breath, staring, hoping against hope that it was an illusion. It was no illusion. Moses groaned from the depth of his heart. The army of Egypt. Had it only been a few

hours later the darkness, dropping, might have helped escape. But now—he could already envisage the panic and the slaughter when the trained host of Egypt fell upon this mass of undisciplined, unarmed men, women, and children. No, Egypt had conquered. The bones of the Hebrews would whiten by the Sea of Reeds. He knew despair. So this was what the God of Sinai had brought him to—or else, perhaps his own sin with Tharbis. For the God of Sinai had deserted him, and his record, he thought bitterly, remembering the Wall of the Princes, was always to be that of a man who brought his plans to success up to the final point and then saw them shattered with disaster. Another day was all he had needed. A few short hours!

But those hours were not to be vouchsafed him. No, Egypt had conquered.

Still, what could be done, should be done.

“Put your young men into phalanx,” he told Joshua. “Try to delay the Egyptians as long as possible.” And turned to his task of driving on the Hebrews.

Already, however, some of the Hebrews had noticed the pillar of dust. They were idly curious at first, looking back at it, speculating on it. It grew larger. Suddenly realization came. The army of Egypt! The Pharaoh was pursuing them! From the rear to the front of the column the word spread. Moses tried to keep them in line, shouting to them that this was their only hope, trying to beat them back into place.

It was a hopeless attempt. Panic had come—and with panic, utter lack of reason. Moses gave up, watching the companies scatter, watching the useless baggage flung on the ground, seeing them mill this way and that like sheep upon whom the dogs have leaped. Moses cursed.

He glanced back at Joshua who was drawing up his young men, and behind Joshua’s phalanx he saw the pillar become a widespread cloud and beneath that cloud were the dread, the disciplined chariots of Egypt. Joshua might delay those chariots a few moments, even a half an hour. But to what effect? Then the chariots would be through, speeding on to an easy victory. Was this, indeed, the final purpose of the God of Sinai? With a despairing cry, Moses lifted his hands to heaven, praying to I AM, the God of Sinai; and felt a puff of wind.

It was only a puff and it was gone. But Moses caught his breath and turned from the Egyptians to the north. The air was as still and as lifeless as before. But there, to the north, drawn across the leaden pall of clouds, was a long line of silver speeding towards them. Even as he looked it advanced, broadening. There was another puff of wind, stronger this time. Moses did not dare

breathe. He did not dare to hope. He was remembering a story, told to him long ago by Jethro in the tents of the Kenites. It was a tale of long before Jethro. "Once in a thousand years," Jethro had said. What if this were the once? If this were the once, he must be ready.

Moses lost his immobility. He looked about him. Most of his leaders were themselves, too, lost in the panic. But he was able to discern Hur and Nun and a few of the others. He hurried to get them about him. He told them to get the people back into line, any sort of line. He rushed about from this group to that, beating at them, cursing them. In the rear the chariots of Egypt were now clearly visible, raising a shout that came faintly to the ears of the Hebrews. But above their heads the line of silver had reached the zenith and suddenly, furiously, out of the lifeless void the wind was upon them, filling the air with flying sand, bending the trees and reeds flat, raising a cloud of sand that cut like particles of glass. And with it came sound, sound that filled the universe until there did not seem to be room for any further thing.

For the moment it added to the confusion. The Hebrews flung themselves flat on the ground, their open mouths showing that they were yelling though their voices could not be heard. Behind Joshua's young men the chariots ceased to advance. Moses paid no heed either to the Egyptians or the Hebrews. He watched the narrow, marshy Sea of Reeds. And then it happened. Yes, even as Jethro had told, it happened. The wind was pressing back the waters. It went back fifty feet, then a hundred, then two hundred. Once in a thousand years. In a furious burst of energy, Moses turned to the Hebrews.

It was hard shepherding the Hebrews across, in the face of that wind. It was hard, at first, even to get them to move. In after years, indeed, Moses often used to wonder how he got them across. At the time, however, he was too busy to wonder. Village by village, men, women and children, donkeys and sheep and goats, whilst the Egyptians were hidden from them by the cloud of dust, he herded them across, fearful that at any moment the waters, now out of sight, would return, fearful lest the Egyptians might perceive what was happening and somehow come struggling up against that wind to prevent them. Indeed, as Joshua's young men started to retire, the leaders of the Egyptians began to sense that something unusual was happening. They ordered their chariots forward. They came on slowly through the dust and the wind, the very breath taken out of the nostrils of their horses by the violence of the gusts. The foremost of them

reached the point where the Sea of Reeds had been just as Joshua was withdrawing his young men across the passage. There was a brief battle on the shore. The Egyptians, however, were too amazed by the sight before them to engage closely. They hesitated on the bank, watching Joshua and his young men crossing, astounded by what they saw.

And then the main mass of the chariots came up. From the Sinai shore Moses saw Merneptah pushing his way up to the front rank and gesturing angrily at his men. The wind ceased. As swiftly as it had come, it stopped. There was a dead calm, a moment so still that the roaring which was still in their ears seemed to beat like thunder. Merneptah cried out and pointed with his mace at the Hebrews on the farther bank, urging on his chariots. Slowly, unwillingly they began to descend into the bed of the Sea of Reeds, crossing over. At Moses' side, Aaron cried out fearfully and there was a sudden backward surge of the Hebrews, and Joshua shouted to his young men, preparing to line the Sinai bank. Moses said nothing. He waited, his eyes on the chariots, remembering Jethro. Once in a thousand years! He saw Merneptah start to drive his horses down the slope to follow the first mass of his chariotry. And then it happened. As suddenly as it had begun and ceased the wind came again. But it blew from the south this time. It roared in from the south. Moses looked to the south. There he saw it advancing, the piled up wall of water which the wind had driven back and which it now poured northward again.

The Egyptians saw it, too. They cried out vainly, trying all of them at once to turn their horses. But the hubs of the chariots sank. For already beneath their feet the water was seeping back under the sand. Over near the bank down which he had just driven, Merneptah, leaving his horses to their fate, leaped from his chariot and scrambled up to safety. And then, just as the Egyptians were in wildest confusion, the wall of water poured over them. One moment, one saw the chariotry of Egypt. The next, the boiling, tumultuous, rushing water had covered them. Had not fierce exultation been in his heart, Moses could have pitied them. But there was no pity in him at this moment. Behind him, he heard, even above the wind, a great shout from the Hebrews. Over to his left, Miriam, for once shocked out of her cynical bitterness, raised her skirts from her thin shanks and began a wild dance, whirling round and round in the wind like a spinning top. Moses turned and raised his hands to Sinai. Once in a thousand years!

CHAPTER IX

It is unfortunate that the moments of highest human exaltation are transitory. On that day when they had found themselves on the farther side of the Sea of Reeds and had beheld the chariotry of Egypt overwhelmed by the tumultuous waves, the Hebrews had leaped in ecstasy. They had praised Yahweh, the God of Sinai. They had called down blessings on Moses, the Chosen of the Lord. At his command, the next morning, they had turned cheerfully southward, believing him when he told them that before they came to Canaan they must first travel a short way into the wilderness to the Holy Mount, there to seal their covenant with the great I AM, who had saved them from the Egyptians. They were now confident that the way would be made easy; for none of them had ever seen the wilderness; and was not Yahweh their Protector, Yahweh, who had led them out of Egypt and had made the sea dry land so that they might pass over and the Egyptians be destroyed? To such a God it would be easy to make the desert blossom like a rose.

In this high mood they had set out, laughing and jesting and singing. But now it was the fourth day. Now their sandals were split open. Grit was between their toes. From above the sun beat down. To their left the wainscoted hills marched endlessly, and to their right, across the brassy waters of the Narrow Sea, a mountain out of Egypt sneered at them. Before them the path through the desolate waste was marked only by the skeleton of a camel or the dry bones of a man. The coral snakes winked venomously, and, as far as the aching eye could see, there was no speck of green save where, at this point or at that, an acacia or a stunted tamarisk clung hopelessly to a mite of soil.

They plodded on. They flung away their useless cherished baggage, their pots and jars, their sticks of furniture, their rugs, their bundles of clothing. They watched their herds and flocks diminish from lack of water and pasture. They ate unleavened bread, cooked from the flour, gritty with sand, which they had brought with them from Egypt or fed on the stinking flesh of a sheep or a goat that had fallen. They would have cursed, if their mouths had not been too dry to curse. And here a man would mutter to his neighbour, "Goshen," and his neighbour would groan and try to spit. And before the eyes of both of them would be the same picture, the picture of the green fields of Goshen, where the flocks fed in the rich grass and the cool canals glistened in the sun and a man could drink as much as he liked, water that

was sweet, water that was cool, that was not bitter like the water of Marah, that did not stink like the foul, tepid water in their sheepskins. Why did the Chosen of the Lord not call on the God of Sinai to perform a miracle? Why did he make them to go through this barren, this desolate, this heat-ridden land?

What they were thinking and feeling did not escape Moses. From morning to night he watched them, riding along the column, giving directions to Joshua, making sure that the stragglers were not left to perish, shepherding this Goshen-born-and-bred people along as one shepherds fat, stall-fed sheep along a narrow causeway over a bottomless quagmire. He was not unduly impatient, knowing that one could not drive people who were unaccustomed to the desert too far or too fast. But he smiled grimly as he heard their murmurings. To him, who knew the Wilderness of Shur as one knows the palm of his hand, there was something pathetic in their complaints. They thought this was terrible, when in reality, since it was still the tag-end of the spring of the year, the wilderness was as a paradise to what it would be later, when the hint of green in the wadis among the hills to their left was completely parched and the water in the streams and pools was dried up and only the wells remained. To them this marching was hard. What would they think when they came to the Wilderness of Sin and turned off into the desolate wadis which led through the tortured ridges to the Holy Mount?

Moses had, in fact, planned the line of the march carefully, both to accustom the Hebrews gradually to the hardships of the desert and also with an eye to the danger of an attack from the Amalekites or some other of the tribes of Sinai. It would have made him feel more secure, indeed, if time could have been taken to organize and train his people. But, proceeding at a snail's pace as they were, they were still too close to Egypt. Moses did not think that the superstitious Merneptah, after the disaster at the Sea of Reeds, would come across the frontier of Egypt to pursue them. Yet it was a possibility and it was not wise to under-rate the spur that the loss of Tharbis might be to him.

Reflection about her led his eyes along the column to the litter in which she rode. There was, for the moment, little of doubt or uncertainty in his face. The miracle of the Crossing had, as Nun had observed, done something for Moses. To Moses the Crossing was as miraculous as it seemed to his untutored followers, though in a different way. Moses might understand in his mind, as Aaron and Nun did, that it was the wind and not the Hand of Yahweh which had pressed back the waters, and he might smile a little when he heard Miriam and Hur talking, as they were already talking in high-flown imagery, of a path cloven for the Hebrews

by Yahweh through the very midst of the sea. Yet it was firmly fixed in Moses' own belief that it was Yahweh who had reached out from Sinai and stirred up the wind. For was He not the God of the Storm Cloud? And was it not His will, as revealed to Moses, that the Hebrews should be led out of Egypt and down to Sinai to worship Him? In his heart Moses bowed to Yahweh. And in his heart, full-blown once more, was the conviction that he was the Chosen of Yahweh and that to him Yahweh revealed His purposes, and that through his lips Yahweh spoke.

Such beliefs were sufficient to lull, if they did not entirely dispel, Moses' doubts about his actions with Tharbis. After all, he argued to himself, she was his wife. And after all, who but Yahweh could have brought her into Merneptah's room, there at Memphis, in the very crisis of events? In the back of his mind, too, was the sneaking thought that, so long as he performed his duty by the Hebrews and fulfilled the mission entrusted to him, what he did with Tharbis might well be of no concern to Yahweh but only to himself.

In the way of the religionists, therefore, Moses had been able to pigeon-hole his two interests of the moment, his mission and Tharbis, in separate compartments. He was, besides, too engrossed in the task of lifting the Hebrews along by the straps of his own sandals to have much time to trouble about her—or to worry, except fitfully, as to what he would do with her when he got to Sinai and found Zipporah there.

Sinai! It seemed to Moses with his usual singleness of purpose that nothing mattered now except to herd this people along the way to Sinai. Once they reached Sinai their troubles would be over. At Sinai, Yahweh would take charge. At Sinai, Yahweh would tell him what to do.

In this mood he brought the host across the Wilderness of Shur to the springs and palms of Elim. In this wise, when the Hill of the Pharaoh blocked off the coastal plain, he led them through the tangle of hills and valleys behind it, where the Hebrews, accustomed to the level expanse of Goshen, looked about them fearfully, even their voices awed as they beheld along the wadis rocks carved as by some demon hand into pyramids without a base and into disjointed obelisks and towers suspended, seemingly, in mid-air, the whole splashed with colour, as if by some madman's brush, orange and crimson side by side with deep-sea green and basalt black and velvet indigo, all dusted over with the gold of the sun.

That night in fear and trembling, thinking that there were devils lurking all around ready to snatch them away, the Hebrews encamped in the hills. On the next day, just as the sun was setting,

they came down a valley and the valley opened before them suddenly, and lo! there was the sea again, the sea thrust inward to meet them in the blue curve of a bay, and the beach was a bright flower of golden sand and iridescent shells, and in the distance, across the sea, the hills of Africa shimmered in pink and mauve and purple. Moses heard them cry out in pleasure. He watched the foremost stream down to the beach, shouting. He glanced at the mountain which, to their right, rising in a series of horizontal steps as if it were some ancient pyramid, shut them off from Egypt. Here, a hundred miles from Goshen, he could feel that his people were, at last, safe from pursuit.

It was in this place therefore that he took time to reorganize the Hebrews. They were busy days. To take men and women who have lived a settled life in villages and to group them in tribes as nomads and yet to try to keep the strength of neighbourliness which villages develop requires pondering. Moses solved it by dividing the Hebrews, not too rigidly, into the twelve tribes of their tradition, whilst maintaining, so far as possible, the village organization within those tribes.

To do this was comparatively simple as compared to the problem of developing a fighting force. To Moses it was clear that to travel any farther without some competent military arrangement in order to protect this motley host and their possessions would be to invite attack and disaster. The Hebrews, however, were not accustomed to war. Nor had they arms worth mentioning, except for Joshua's groups of young men. To improvise arms was not an impossibility, and Joshua, to whom a practical problem of this sort was stimulating, proved inventive. Tent poles could be hardened in the fire. The brass of ornaments could be used for spear points and arrowheads. Slings were not hard to make.

But when it came to discipline and organization Moses and Joshua faced a seemingly hopeless task. At last a compromise was effected. It was decided that Joshua's young men, divided into their companies, should be the chief fighting force and should be distributed as advance guards and rear guards and flank guards as far as possible. For the rest each tribe was to provide for itself in rotation from its villages a fighting force, possessing all the weapons the tribe had, to be constantly on the alert.

To this rudimentary organization, both military and social, Moses tried also to give centrality. The Tent of Meeting had already been established as the place of council. It now became the centre of justice and of the military leaders as well. Before it, set somewhat apart from the host, burned a fire as a symbol of Yahweh, sending up a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of smoke

by day. Before it, weddings were celebrated—and amongst them the wedding of Hur and Miriam, who had decided to merge their tendency to criticize all others except themselves. In it, from morning to night, Moses sat to listen to complaints and quarrels and to mete out justice.

All these activities left him, during the more than a fortnight which was spent by the sea, little space for his own personal affairs. A leader, he was coming to find, is also the servant of his people. He did make occasions to see his mother, lying on her bed in Aaron's tent. Jochebed, indeed, had endured the removal from Goshen and the journey through the wilderness much better than anyone could have anticipated. Something of her intelligence had come back to her and she knew her son when he appeared and would stretch forth her arms to him and would comprehend in certain lucid moments that Moses had led forth the Hebrews from Egypt.

"Ah, if Amram, your father, could have seen it," she would say in these moments and in the next she would be back in her mind in Tanis or walking in the palace of Bint-Anath near Memphis.

At these instants Aaron and Moses would glance at each other, and the estrangement which dated from the night before the Crossing began to disappear. The difference in viewpoint between them remained, since to Moses there was a lack of faith in Aaron and a tendency to look so carefully all around a subject that he never ventured into action; whilst to Aaron, his brother was a sudden and unpredictable person who overawed him and was obsessed by an incomprehensible trust in that strange God, Yahweh, and yet slept with a Kushite whore. But, tacitly, they sank their differences and began once more, as had been the case in Goshen, to discuss what was best for the Hebrews.

In these circumstances the problem of Tharbis received little attention from Moses. He slept with her each night. His mind, however, was too full of manifold duties to ponder her, and Tharbis could sense this. It infuriated her. On that day when, contrary to all expectation, deliverance by Merneptah had not come but, instead, the amazing event of the Crossing, she had lost control of herself. Moses had not been by when she had shrieked curses at all who were near her, at Hur and at Miriam and at Aaron. But that night when Moses, full of exaltation at what he believed to be a miracle, had come into her tent, she had broken down. Sobbing, she had begged him not to take her with him into the desert but to send her back to Egypt. He had stared at her in amazement.

"I thought you said you loved me," he had observed roughly.

"I do," she had exclaimed hastily, realizing her error and trying to repair it. "I do, Moses. I have always loved you." She had flung herself into his arms. "I will go anywhere with you, anywhere. Only not into the desert."

He had removed her clasp gently but firmly.

"Why not into the desert?" he had demanded. "You say you love me?"

"I can't stand the desert," she had wailed. "What is there in the desert? No cities, no shops, no—no civilization—nothing. I shall die in the desert, Moses."

He had sat there, thinking. She did not know that, once again, as seemed always to be the case with him when she was involved, he was appreciating her point of view, seeing things through her eyes, remembering her delight in the old days in the shops in Avaris, in the admiration of men. Tharbis could not guess why it was that at this point his face had changed and his jaws had set, since she was not able to see into his mind where that thought "the admiration of men" had revived other pictures in his memory, pictures that recalled to him his deep suspicions of her motives and his even deeper conviction, whenever he was not entranced by her, of her worthlessness and fickleness. She had ventured:

"I would only be a trouble to you in the desert, Moses. Why not send me back? You could send me back so easily."

"You will travel with me to Sinai," he had told her harshly. "Perhaps then I'll send you back. Perhaps not." He had paused. "After all, you slept with Merneptah. And for all I know, with a dozen others."

"Moses! I swore to you."

"I know."

"I will swear again. Any oath you ask."

Moses had not answered. It was, in her opinion, most unfair, since she had by now convinced herself that she was really doing him a favour in deceiving him about her affairs, which were after all, she thought to herself, strictly her own business. And what more could he ask than an oath? It was she who took the risk of punishment from the gods, not he.

"You don't think I'd perjure myself, do you?" she had asked. "I'd be afraid to. You know that."

She could see that Moses was not sure. He had turned troubled eyes upon her.

"I wouldn't," she had declared, throwing her arms about him again. "By all the gods, I swear it."

But there was in Moses' consciousness one firm-fixed fact, that Tharbis was in his power and that, when it came to the pinch, he could not bear to let her go, not yet.

"After Sinai," he had repeated stubbornly.

It was then that she had lost her temper a second time. But he had seized her so roughly when she had spat at him and had looked at her so grimly that, frightened, she had let him do what he wished with her. Later, thinking it over, her instinct told her that she had made a mistake. Since Merneptah had failed her Moses seemed to be her only hope. In this mood she had set out to smooth over his reawakened suspicions of her sincerity, not complaining on the march, at least in words, since she was actress enough to know that an air of patient resignation to wrongs is in itself a weapon for a beautiful woman, and being careful not to let her eyes stray, not even over to Reuben who, she had decided even in Goshen, might be interesting. . . . She felt that she was succeeding, and, when the stop was made by the sea, hope rose in her again. This place was not, in reality, so far from Egypt. And in this place, the restlessness of the march, which had kept Moses too occupied really to become absorbed in her, would be out of the way. It would be strange if she could not so entrance him that she could get her way.

So she had thought, only to discover that Moses was even busier than on the march. When, at last, she did speak to him, it was to receive the same answer.

"Wait till Sinai," he told her. "At Sinai, I will decide."

But perhaps I will not wait till Sinai, Tharbis told herself, and began to cast her eyes about her once more, circumspectly.

Moses, however, was too occupied to notice. This encampment was to him only a stage on his journey, although a necessary stage. As soon as he thought the Hebrews sufficiently organized, breaking up the encampment by the sea, he led them into the Wilderness of Sin, believing that, refreshed by their rest and re-organized and a hundred miles out from Goshen, his people were by now completely weaned from Egypt. He was soon to discover his error. For when the Hebrews, who had thought in the encampment by the sea that their troubles were over and that soon they would be in Sinai—whence, the hopeful rumour spread, it was but a short step to Canaan—found themselves once more in the wilderness, the discontent, which had been gathering in them since the very first day of the march, began to surge higher. And this was a wilderness more desolate than the Wilderness of Shur. Here the mountains loomed over them and the ground beneath their feet was jagged stone or flinty sand and the heat pressed down like a brazen palm and the hot heavy air boiled with mirage and there was practically no water and the food they had brought with them from the encampment stank in the

knapsacks. They hesitated to slay the once fat sheep and goats since they realized it was on these flocks that they must depend for life in the desert. When were their troubles to end? Was it for this that they had left Goshen, to die of heat and thirst and starvation in the desert?

Moses heard them grumbling. He thought that it would pass as it had passed before and paid but little heed to it. And then to add to their torment, a wind arose, blowing from the mountains. It was not a cool wind. It was the very breath of Gehenna, parching the peoples' throats, drying out the last bit of moisture from them, filling their clothes and their eyes and their hair with fine particles of sand.

This was the final touch. When in mid-afternoon of the second day they came to a little oasis where a wadi ran down from the hills and fed with a parsimonious finger of water a dozen bed-ragged palms and a few muddy, brackish pools, the head of the column broke, rushing in to trample in the water and to absorb what little there was before it was all gone. Moses observed this impatiently since it was his intention to press forward to a larger oasis some five miles farther on, from which he intended to turn inland to Sinai. He was willing, however, to let the column have surcease for a moment and rode slowly to the head of it, watching the people. It was when he saw that men and women were scattering to lie down in the shade that it seemed best to take action. He ordered the men carrying the bowl of fire at the head of the column to take it up as a sign that it was time to go on. When no one stirred, he commanded the rams' horns to be sounded.

There was still no movement and the confusion was increasing instead of lessening. Moses frowned angrily. He rode his horse among the palms, commanding the Hebrews to form up and begin the march again. Before he could realize it, a mob was around him, shouting, shrieking, catching at his legs and arms. Had he shown any sign of fear they would have had him off his horse. But his own anger rose so powerfully and his voice rang out so fiercely that they remembered who he was and shrank back from him.

"What is it you want?" he inquired, looking round at them, his brows knit. "Come, have you lost your tongues? Speak out, some of you."

"To return to Egypt," a voice called out to him.

He could not believe his ears. "Who was that?" he demanded. "Bring him forward, some of you."

The man did not wait to be pushed forward. He stepped out boldly and Moses looked at him, remembering in the back of his

mind that at Kes in Goshen he had thought to himself that this Reuben would bear watching.

"Well?" he questioned. "What is your complaint? Have I not led you forth from Egypt?"

"Aye—to die in the desert," Reuben answered.

Moses felt a furious blaze of anger. But the sixth sense which a leader must have told him that at this moment the mass of those around were in sympathy with this man.

"You will not die in the desert," he said. "For soon we will be in Sinai."

"Sinai!" Reuben snorted. "First it was Canaan. Now it is Sinai. Back in Goshen you promised that within a week, or, at most, ten days we would be in Canaan—Canaan, a land that flowed with milk and honey. I ask you, is this Canaan?"

He flung his arm around him in a wide sweeping gesture which took in the brassy sky and the bedraggled skimpy palms and the muddied holes where the water had been and the parching wind blowing from the jagged, barren, demon-tortured hills. Moses heard a murmur of assent in the mob around him. He spoke to them, over the head of Reuben.

"At least you are free from the task-masters," he pointed out, raising his voice. "The whip does not hiss. There are no stakes of impalement. Nor do the guards take a child and put him in a jar to be sealed up in the walls of Pithom. Aye, at least, you are free of Egypt."

"Would we were back in Egypt," a voice called out and shouts answered it. "Aye, would that we were back in Egypt," the shouters cried.

Moses was appalled. Even in his wildest imaginings, it had never occurred to him that anyone of this host which he had led forth could so soon forget what they had suffered in Egypt or could, even in the midst of heat and thirst and hunger, seriously wish to return to it. Did they not remember the tortures of Egypt? Did they not remember the rape, the burnings, the massacres, the guards, the soldiers? These were the things that his amazement prevented him for the instant from shouting at them. Before he could speak, Reuben picked up the moment.

"Aye," he burst out. "In Egypt we ate bread, fresh bread, to the full. In Egypt we sat by the fleshpots. In Egypt we had water to drink, all the water a man could drink."

There was a red veil before Moses' eyes, a temper which vitiated his judgment. He heard himself crying out as if the words were not his own but had been put into his mouth:

"Come with me to the place which I have chosen for our encampment this night. Follow me thither. By Yahweh, by

the Lord God of Sinai, by the great I AM Himself, when morning comes ye shall gather bread and stuff yourselves with it and before the next even ye shall have flesh to eat. By Yahweh, who clove the waters of the Sea of Reeds so that you might pass over dryshod, not wetting the soles of your feet, I swear it."

Reuben looked up at him, satirical. "You mean it?" he asked.

Moses' vision cleared a little. He had, however, gone too far to retreat; and at the same time he realized that his words had recalled to the Hebrews the miracle of the Crossing and that they were remembering that he was the Chosen of Yahweh so that Reuben had lost them. His own mind, clutching at a frantic thought, was remembering the sight he had often seen under the trees in that same oasis to which he was leading them, and something more, an event which sometimes occurred when there was a wind like this, but for which he scarcely dared to hope. If only Yahweh heard his prayer! If only Yahweh did not fail him!

"I swear," he proclaimed in a loud, assured voice.

He heard the murmur of doubting belief and the stir of movement and knew that he had won.

"And now, fall in," he ordered. "The place of encampment is not far off."

That night they encamped close to the sea in an oasis which was the richest and greenest and most plenteous in tamarisk and acacia trees, as well as in palms, of any that the Hebrews had seen since they had first been launched into the wilderness. Their voices sounded almost contented as they set up their tents and shelters and lit their fires and prepared for the night, casting curious glances at Moses as he sat apart at the Tent of Meeting, the pillar of fire rising beside him. But Moses was not content. That in the morning the Hebrews would find spread on the ground under the trees, like dew, a hoary substance which could be gathered and made into cakes tasting something like honey, he could be fairly sure, since it was a phenomenon quite usual in Sinai at this season of the year. All the tribesmen of the peninsula, not knowing what it was or whence it came, called it the "food of the gods," believing it miraculous. Jethro, indeed, he recalled, had speculated as to whether it might be an exudation from the tamarisk and acacias or a deposit by some insect.

About this, then, he was not particularly worried, even though he knew that Aaron, having heard what he had promised, regarded him as a reckless fool, while Miriam looked at him satirically, and only Joshua and, curiously enough, Nun, seemed to have faith. The possibility of the other event occurring, however, even though the wind still blew, seemed so unlikely that he was ready to agree with Aaron, realizing that if his promise to the

Hebrews were not fulfilled his influence over them would be badly shaken if not destroyed. And Reuben would be waiting. Yes, that man had the potentialities of real danger in him.

This, however, was not settling his problem. Nor was there anything he could do to help solve it. He could only wait and pray to Yahweh. All night, sitting by the fire and not going to his tent, Moses prayed to Yahweh. In the morning before the light was really come he rose and went among the trees, searching the ground. Yes, he saw with thankfulness, his knowledge had not failed him. The "food of the gods" was there; and he knew his moment of triumph when the first of the Hebrews, waking and looking around them, saw it and exclaimed and woke the others to behold the miracle.

When a double miracle has been promised so definitely, however, the fulfilment of the first half merely whets the appetite for the accomplishment of the second and greater part. Nor was Reuben one not to remind the Hebrews. As the day wore on Moses could observe the people watching him hopefully and, so he imagined, a trifle sceptically. He told himself in anger that they were a thankless race. Surely the "food of the gods" ought to have been enough to have convinced them. Yet the fact was that they were not convinced. The one thing that was hopeful was that the wind still streamed down from the hills. He began to scan those hills anxiously. He was still watching them when the sun began to set, but in desperation now. For as the sun had started to sink to the horizon the Hebrews had begun to gather, silently, before the Tent of Meeting. They said nothing. They simply waited.

Moses might suspect Reuben's hand in this. That suspicion did not cure the situation. And there was so little time. Already the first skirts of the dusk were beginning to lower themselves. Already, a restless murmur was beginning to be heard in the waiting host. How soon might not that host become a mob, a mob which Reuben would know how to direct. The very fact that Joshua had come to stand silently at his side increased Moses' sense of isolation. There was but one hope. At the approach of evening the wind had started to die away and it was dropping rapidly now. "Yahweh!" he prayed, wordlessly, repeating it over and over. "Yahweh!" At last, realizing the dusk, in one final act of desperation, he rose from where he sat and faced the mountains, stretching out his hands, his head thrown back, his lips moving soundlessly.

It was at that moment that they appeared, a cloud of them, so thick that they blotted out the peaks of the hills, moving heavily, tired by their long flight over the mountains before

the following wind, just as he had seen them, coming over the mountains and down upon this plain, time after time, during the years. And the wind was failing, had failed. Moses could see the quails dropping, faster and still faster, as the wind stopped, coming now only in little gusts. As they neared the camp the huge flight was not more than a cubit from the ground. And then they were tumbling into the camp, their bodies hitting the ground all around with a soft, feathered plop. Behind him, Moses heard the exclamations, the cries, the wondering gasps of breath. The sense of power rose in him as a tide, swollen by an earthquake, rises. Yahweh had not failed him! He was still Moses, the Chosen of Yahweh, the Vessel of the Mighty I AM. For, as with the wind of the Crossing, so now with the quails had Yahweh sent him aid in the very nick of time. Lowering his arms, he turned and faced the Hebrews. They were silent, seeing him, his frame towering in the dusk, the pillar of fire beside him. A bitter strength flowed into him.

"And now, ye doubters, ye unregenerates, ye stiff-necked sons of Abraham, ye lusters after Egypt, will ye believe?" he cried at them. "Now, will ye do the will of Yahweh?"

There was an awed murmur of assent.

"There is your flesh, ye offal whom I AM brought up out of Egypt, though ye deserve it not. For the God of Sinai is merciful. Even though ye doubted Him hath He sent you flesh. But beware lest ye tempt Him too far. Yes, you, Reuben, beware lest you tempt Him and me too far."

They had no words. Reuben had no words.

"Eat and be filled," Moses flung at them. "Eat your fill. For, then, in my own good time, will I lead you on to Sinai."

"On to Sinai," a voice called out, suddenly, hysterically. As one man the host picked it up: "On to Sinai!" The deep-throated cry went up to the darkening vault of the heavens.

Moses stood, looking at them, content, triumphant. For, even if from time immemorial quails such as these had flown across the peninsula of Sinai before a following wind to come down in the wilderness, yet, that they had come just at this time was a miracle which he never thought of questioning. He stood there, once more the Chosen of Yahweh, once more the master of this people.

Over at the door of her tent, Tharbis turned and went inside. This, too, had failed. But Reuben was an instrument which could be used again.

CHAPTER X

IN the long course of the ages the Holy Mount had seen much that was strange in the plain beneath it, the Kenites at their yearly festival, the people before the Kenites and the people before them, back to the first primitives who in their lumbering gait and downward-looking heads had not been much different from the apes—and to all of these Sinai had been a holy mountain. But it had never beheld such a host as that which in the third month after the Hebrews had left Egypt, was encamped beneath it. In the grey dawn the tents, arranged in rows, seemed to cover all the plain. Beyond them one could just make out the flocks scattered on the outskirts of the level space. There was a hillock at the opening of the precipitous defile through which the Hebrews had poured into the plain, so that it seemed set there as a watcher. On this, where the Kenites had decades before built their high altar to Yahweh, the God of Sinai, a gleaming pillar of fire marked the Tent of Meeting. To one side of it, if one looked carefully, were smaller tents, the tents of Moses and Aaron and Joshua and Hur.

Out of his tent at this moment stepped Moses. His glance took in the pillar of fire and the Tent of Meeting. He looked at the peak of Sinai; and, had there been anyone to observe him, he would have seen Moses make humble obeisance to That which he believed dwelt upon that mountain. Then he strolled to the lip of the hillock and gazed down at the tents dotted over the plain. A certain thrill of achievement ran through him. In spite of a thousand obstacles he had brought this people to Sinai. Yes, in spite of desert and rocky defiles and lack of water and the fierce Amalekites—who had charged down on the Hebrews in the narrow passes and would have destroyed them, had it not been for the military genius of the young Joshua—the people were now in the presence of their God, the God who had commanded that they should be brought forth from Egypt to His Holy Mount, there to worship Him and to receive His bidding.

What that bidding was to be had not, as yet, been revealed, and Moses frowned as he looked at the tents, wishing that Jethro, to whom he had sent word by Elihun of his arrival, would hasten his coming. For, apart from the Will of Yahweh, there were, so Moses had discovered, a thousand vexatious problems involved in changing the mode of life of the Hebrews. On the march these difficulties had not been so evident. Now, however, that they were settled on the plain of Sinai and had leisure, there had

been an epidemic of lawlessness, of violence, of crimes against women so that a constant stream of complaints kept coming to the Tent of Meeting for his judgment.

Moses did not altogether understand that these disturbances were the inevitable result of uprooting the Hebrews, and that to attempt to transform too abruptly a people of settled abodes and fixed customs into a nomadic race was bound to disrupt their social and religious habits. He could appreciate, however, that there were certain problems that were new to them, the question of boundaries of pasture for flocks, for instance, in a country in which no boundaries existed and the tendencies of flocks and herds to become intermingled so that there were strays and younglings with no fixed ownership. He could also comprehend that the gods of Egypt and those Hebraic gods—Joseph-el and Jacob-el and Ashur and the rest—which had been worshipped in Egypt, now appeared far off and unreal to the Hebrews so that the taboos imposed by them were ceasing to have meaning and effect—the more particularly since people who had once lived in isolated communities all over Goshen were now flung together in one huge encampment. In a village in Goshen if you stole your neighbour's ox or his wife, everyone knew of it and you, yourself, knew your neighbour and his family. But here, you were flung cheek by jowl with strangers, and why should you worry about a stranger or about the vengeance of your village god when he dwelt in far-off Goshen so that his power was weak, and, in any case, was not the offence against a stranger? This was how they seemed to argue.

The first spears of the true dawn were thrusting themselves up into the sky. There was the beginning of movement in the tents. Moses sighed, realizing that his day's activity would soon begin: a mob of people pouring into his tent with their complaints, full of contradictory evidence and ready to swear to anything or everything to make good their case. For their new-found freedom had also made the Hebrews litigious—and no man went away entirely satisfied, even if the decision was wholly in his favour, since in that case he wished that he had asked for more. It was a fleeting thought in Moses' mind that he was making a mistake in being so accessible. There had been a rule he had followed in Goshen—be not too common. That rule was being broken.

His mind, however, was too occupied to ponder this thought further at the moment. His brain returned to his immediate problem. In that dreaming, visionary part of him he had imagined that in some vague and general way the wilderness would make new men and women of the Hebrews and would purge out of them not only their slave mentality but also their corruptness of custom

and belief. As he stood here, however, he was beginning to perceive dimly that the Hebrews, bereft of the complex social and religious habits built up by generations of life in Egypt, would be helpless and bewildered, possessing no certain standards of right and wrong, until a new custom was imposed on them. The idea became clearer as he thought of it. These men and women were, in a way, hanging suspended between two worlds, the one from which they had been removed and the new one into which he had tried to thrust them but which they had not, as yet, accepted. In his simplicity he had thought that to bring them to Sinai was enough, that in some mysterious fashion the very act of sealing them to Yahweh, their new God, would transform them.

The problem, however, was more complex. On the march, occupied with the actual physical business of getting this vast host, by the hook of power or by the crook of guidance, to Sinai, Moses had scarcely been aware of it. Now, however, that instinct of the wise, foreseeing, subtle leader of men to deceive people to their advantage was awakening in him again. Somehow, he realized, new and firm-fixed rules of life, suited to their new mode of living, must be established for the Hebrews, rules with so strong a sanction that none would dare transgress them.

As to the source of the sanction there was, to Moses, only one answer: Yahweh; nor did it occur to him, as it would have occurred to Nun, that soon he would reach the process of rationalizing into mysticism what his mind had already told him was the practical thing to be done. He glanced up at Sinai. The plain still lay in the shadow. On Sinai, however, the first rays of the coming sun, smiting the cloud which hung on the peak, streaked it through with pulsating light, a light that was like streaks of blood. In his mind Moses did obeisance to That which he believed looked at him from out that cloud. Let Jethro come, he prayed to That within the cloud. Jethro would give him counsel.

As he turned away he saw Miriam come out of the tent of Hur and start to gather up the sticks of firewood she had placed ready the night before. He walked towards her. She straightened to look at him, and he observed how gaunt her figure was in the dim light.

"You are up early this morning, Brother Moses," she remarked.

In those simple words as she said them, there was a sting and a bitterness, since Moses knew that they were to be interpreted as a contemptuous reference to the fact that Tharbis was in his tent; and it was an uncomfortable thought that Aaron shared in the same critical animosity. He said:

"I wondered if Jethro might be coming."

"With him, I presume, will be your Kenite wife."

"Tharbis, too, is my wife. Before I met Zipporah, she was my wife."

"A Kushite woman!" Miriam observed. She picked up a jar ready to go over and get embers from the edge of the fire by the Tent of Meeting. "With eyes for every man in the camp," she added.

Moses flushed. He knew that Miriam said this because, the day before, she had come on Tharbis busily engaged in fascinating Hur. Moses had understood that Tharbis was not serious but had been trying out her charms on Hur just because he was the only man around at the moment. He would have liked to have explained this to his sister. But he could not do this without demeaning her husband and, therefore, herself. So he retorted sharply: "That is my own affair."

"It will not long be your own affair," predicted Miriam.

"Not when you stone Hebrew women for adultery, as you had one stoned yesterday." She started to move off. "I wonder what your Kenite wife will think of her," she tossed back over her shoulder.

Moses watched her go. He turned to study the plain once more. The tents were beginning to stand out as the dawn walked down from the mountain-tops. Reuben was down there, Reuben whom he had caught more than once staring in a bemused way at Tharbis while Tharbis affected an altogether too elaborate unconcern of him. There had been nothing subversive in Reuben that he could put his finger on since the Wilderness of Sin, nothing except an occasional casual question as to when and how soon they would start for Canaan, as if Reuben knew that this would irritate Moses. Canaan! Moses thought now. Canaan was a myth, a legend which he had used to lure the Hebrews out of Egypt. Its value was over but no leader likes to be reminded of promises which, he hopes, have been decently interred and conveniently forgotten. In Reuben's case, moreover, it was a symptom of the danger he felt to be implicit in the man.

Though not with respect to Tharbis. She, so far as Moses had been able to observe, was behaving herself correctly, even though he had no more confidence in her than a man has in a fawning dog which has bitten him. For some reason, however, he was not as violently interested in Tharbis as he had been. It may have been that, at his age, his desire had been assuaged. Or it may have been that his interest in the Hebrews, whom he had come to love as a man loves any flock which he has shepherded for weary months, had grown so great that it was beginning

to obscure his mad infatuation. Or, possibly, the feeling that she was now completely in his power had lulled him somewhat so that his passion smouldered instead of leaping up into violent flame. In any case he could think of her without the emotion which had for so many years tended to shatter him.

In his mind now, however, as he turned to go back to his tent, was the problem which Miriam's words had recalled to his mind. With Jethro would come Zipporah. How would Zipporah act when she found, unexpectedly, another wife in his tent?

CHAPTER XI

It was not until the morning of the second day thereafter that Elihun appeared at the Tent of Meeting to tell Moses that Jethro was at hand. Moses rose up hastily. Abandoning the Tent of Meeting and the complainants thronging before it, he set out to meet his father-in-law. He came upon him in the wadi which at the farther side debouches into the plain of Sinai. On the camels with Jethro were Zipporah and their two sons. Affection surged up in Moses, an affection behind which lurked a throb of dread, and in the gladness of greeting he knew a sense of constraint and even of guilt. Which was absurd. What cause had he to feel guilty? Yet the fact remained that Tharbis was in his tent and that Zipporah, slipping off her kneeling camel to rush into his arms, her face alight with joy and her eyes brimming over, did not know of it. Time, he saw, had stood still for her until he returned. But for three years Time had sped on with him, carrying him forward on its wings. How could he tell her? What words would he find?

As he thought this, at his side, Jethro, having also dismounted, was staring out of the mouth of the wadi at the tents of the Hebrews.

"So you brought them forth, my son," he said in a tone of wonder. "You brought them forth from Egypt."

Moses was glad to have his moment of revelation postponed. He released Zipporah.

"Yes," he said, pride filling him. "I brought them forth. I, and Yahweh, brought them forth from Egypt. For truly Yahweh hath wrought miracles for me."

"Tell me, my son."

Moses told him. As they moved to the mouth of the wadi and began to skirt the encampment, those tribesmen whom Jethro had brought with him as an escort fetching the camels

after him, Moses described to Jethro the miracle of the Crossing and of the quails in the Wilderness of Sin.

"In Egypt, too, did He work miracles," he proclaimed. "For He gave me power to overcome the magicians of Egypt and stirred up the Tehenu and the Peoples of the Sea to plague the Egyptians so that I, alone—one man against the Pharaoh and the might of Egypt and the gods of Egypt—was able to lead the Hebrews out of slavery."

"Truly, Yahweh is great," Jethro said, his voice awed. "For I did not think that Yahweh could have power in Egypt, so far from Sinai. I thought that the gods of Egypt would prevail over Him. Now I see that I was wrong and that you were right. Now I see that Yahweh is stronger than all other gods and that His power is not limited. For He hath prevailed over the gods of Egypt. Aye, blessed be Yahweh, for that He hath brought the Hebrews out of Egypt."

"And blessed be He for that He hath brought you back to me," Zipporah said softly, a shyness in her face as she looked at her husband.

Moses looked back at her. It seemed to him that he could not mar that expression of pure, whole-souled love and devotion. And he wondered, too, how his sons, Gershom and Eliezer, would receive the news of Tharbis. Yet they were by now approaching the knoll on which stood the Tent of Meeting and he could not let Zipporah come to it without informing her as to who was inside his own tent. He had hoped to do it tactfully. As it was he blurted out:

"I came upon my wife in Egypt, the wife whom I left when I fled into the desert twenty years ago."

He could feel the quick withdrawal of Zipporah within herself, and it surprised him to discover how keenly this affected him.

"A wife!" Jethro exclaimed, thinking back rapidly to Moses' reluctance to wed with Zipporah and guessing that this was the woman whom he had at that time divined.

"She is here," Zipporah breathed. "Here—with you."

It was a statement rather than a question. Moses nodded, telling himself in an instinctive reaction to the feeling of guilt within him that Zipporah had no cause to be angry, since for twenty years she had not had, as she might reasonably have expected, a rival for his bed. Yet it could not fail to affect him that a moment ago her whole being had breathed out happiness whereas now she was hurt and shrinking and he was, indeed, more aware of her than he had ever been. At his side Jethro rubbed his nose reflectively. There was in him no condemnation of Moses on moral grounds, since every man among the Kenites

and the neighbouring tribes had more than one wife as soon as he could support more than one, and chieftains who limited themselves to two were unusual. But, remembering what a devastating effect this woman had once had on Moses, he felt an intense curiosity about her; and he wondered, too, what consequences with respect to his daughter's happiness were involved. Seeing her face, dulled as if a veil had been put over a light, made Jethro uncomfortable. It even made him reflect for the first time in his six and seventy years that this custom of men having more than one wife, though prevalent in the whole world, so far as he knew it, might be difficult for a woman. Which was absurd, he told himself. Was not this custom, quite evidently, the natural law of the universe? Consider the flocks and herds. No, Zipporah, like all other women, would have to make the best of it.

"We will welcome your wife to the desert," he said to Moses.

Zipporah said nothing. It was true that she did not question her husband's right to his second wife, and she tried to tell herself that she had been fortunate, more fortunate, perhaps, than she deserved, in that for twenty years Moses had not taken any other woman. But she found it difficult to be reasonable. She found herself rebelling against age-old custom, thinking, pettishly, that it was a man's custom, not a woman's. But what really shattered her was that it was this woman from Egypt, this Tharbis—the name was graven on her heart and she could have no doubt—of whom, ever since Moses had lain in delirium she had known a fierce jealousy, feeling always that part of her husband was given over to her. So now this Tharbis had turned out to be his wife. So now, in the scheme of that ironic lunatic who dwelt on Sinai, this Tharbis had stepped out of the background of uncertainty into her own life. She remembered fleetingly how great her happiness had been when Elihun had come and, after three years and more of silence, of wonder where Moses was and whether he was, for that matter, among the living, she had realized him alive and returned to her. The pace of the camels across the desert from the fringe of Midian, where the Kenites were encamped, had seemed slow. A few short moments ago she had thought that her heart would burst, seeing Moses. But now—now—Yahweh, she told herself, glancing up at Sinai, was a man's God, not a woman's. He could not see into a woman's heart. Else He would not have brought this to pass.

"I could not leave her behind," Moses remarked, defensively, even though he had been telling himself that he had nothing to excuse. "She was my wife."

I am your wife, too—a true wife, Zipporah wanted to say

But the hurt was too deep—and, besides, some wise instinct advised her to say nothing. She went on in silence, wondering what she would say, what she would do when she saw this Tharbis. She knew that she would want to scratch her eyes out. It occurred to her that she had never asked much, or expected much of life—only the love of Moses. Even that much, apparently, was denied her.

When, however, she faced Tharbis that noon, instead of anger she felt an agony of hopelessness. She is beautiful, she kept thinking to herself, as she murmured the words of welcome which custom decreed, Beautiful! And kept imagining Moses with her and told herself that it was no wonder he was lost in her, that he was completely captivated by this delicate, this perfumed, this daintily shaped woman, not knowing that her husband, looking from one to the other of his wives, was seeing Zipporah as he had never seen her before and realizing that she had a beauty which he had scarcely appreciated. Tharbis, too, felt a warning drum of danger. What she had expected when she had heard of Zipporah's coming had been to meet some desert wench, coarsely good-looking, perhaps, but ignorant and animal-like. Now, however, examining her with a woman's eye, the broad brow, the burnished hair, the figure, which though fuller than her own, had that just proportion which gives harmony, she perceived a rival who might not be as easily overcome as she had anticipated. To a woman of Tharbis' temperament this was a challenge which took Moses and placed him at once on a pedestal of desirability. She might be contemptuous of him and actually dislike him. But this other woman, she resolved at once, no matter if she herself did not care whether Moses lived or died, should not have him; and the glances she cast at her husband were languishing in their promise, while Moses stood by uncomfortably, with that discomfort which a man feels in the presence of women when he knows that currents which he cannot understand are flowing around him. When they were outside again Zipporah said to him, submissively:

"Where shall I place my tent?"

Moses looked around. He had not thought of this.

"Next to mine, I suppose," he said hesitatingly.

Zipporah tossed her head. "At the back," she said clearly to the tribesmen. "At the very back. As far away as possible." And she walked away.

No man, Moses thought once more to himself, watching her go, can ever understand women. He shook his head, pondering. But then he remembered Jethro and all that he had to do and was glad of this means of escape. That afternoon, in between the cases

to be judged, he made Jethro known to Aaron and Hur and Joshua and the other leaders of the Hebrews. Late that night, standing on the lip of the hillock, the light of torches around them, he presented Jethro, the Priest of Yahweh, to the Hebrews, Jethro, through whose aid the will of the God of Sinai should be revealed to them. Then before all the assembled multitude Jethro offered up an offering to Yahweh, a blood offering and a burnt offering, entreating Him to reveal Himself and to accept this people as His own. Still later Moses and Jethro sat together in the Tent of Meeting. For a time they discussed details, the character and possibilities of Aaron and Hur and Joshua, and whether or not it would be wise to bring the Kenites from the fringes of Midian to join the Hebrews.

"It would be a problem," Jethro said, "for the Kenites have always regarded the plain of Sinai as their own and the God of Sinai as theirs alone. Besides, their customs will be different."

This brought back to Moses his reflections of two days before. He explained his difficulties to his father-in-law, the stubbornness of the Hebrews, their intractability, their lawlessness, the breakdown of their traditional customs and taboos so that many of them seemed to feel that all restraints were removed.

Jethro passed his fingers through his beard. "In some way new laws must be given them," he suggested.

"That has already occurred to me. Would the laws of the Kenites, think you, be fitting?"

Jethro shook his head. "The laws of the Kenites are their own. They have validity for them, having grown up amongst them for centuries and being sanctified by custom. To the Hebrews, they would seem alien, an imposition from people whom, it may be, they will have a tendency to despise as desert dwellers. Suppose a dispute arises between a Hebrew and a Kenite—is that dispute to be adjudged by Kenite laws? No, my son, you must find new laws."

"Where shall I find them?"

"The laws of Babylon," Jethro reflected. "Or the laws of Egypt. There are, too, I presume, laws among the Hebrews that can be preserved."

"But how to weld them all into one? How to evolve a whole complete system which will suit their altered circumstances and, at the same time, have such validity that these stiff-necked Hebrews will obey and never question them?"

"Should they not," Jethro murmured, "be laws such as would suit the God of Sinai?"

Moses had already thought of this vaguely. Now, however, in the stimulation which discussions with Jethro always gave

him, his mind, as is the custom with the minds of leaders, suddenly flashed far ahead of his father-in-law's and saw in a moment the solution, full-fledged. In his mind's eye were the laws of Egypt, persisting in part because of custom but in part, also, because they were said to have been revealed by the gods to men. And he recalled, too, the ceremonial whereby the priests of Egypt kept the people in awe. The priests of Egypt, however, had to share their authority with the Pharaoh, although the two were merged after a fashion in that the Pharaoh was a god, Horus-on-Earth, and his queen was the Chief-Concubine-of-Amon. But why not a people who should be ruled directly by Yahweh Himself, Yahweh speaking through the lips of Moses, His Chosen One?

"You know, Moses, you waste yourself," observed Jethro, who had been following his own line of thought. "I watched you this afternoon. Judging complaints. You should have men to do that for you. Only the hard cases should be brought to you."

This suggestion fitted in with what Moses was already thinking to himself. "Be not too common. Set yourself apart." He would establish a priesthood, he decided, a priesthood of Yahweh. And the Ark of the Kenites which, indeed, so Jethro had told him, had been borrowed in turn from the ancient practice in the plain of Babylon . . .

"There shall be rulers of the people," he said. "And the Ark of the Kenites, Jethro. It shall become the Ark of the Hebrews."

"Well, that is reasonable."

"And soon, in a day or two, when Yahweh hath spoken to me, I shall go up into Sinai, there to receive His commands. Yea, the Hebrews shall be ruled by Yahweh."

On this high note he parted outside the Tent of Meeting with a Jethro who was still trying to estimate how greatly Moses had changed in these years. Down in the plain, under the sickle moon, the Hebrews slept. Moses stopped to stare down at them. These were his people, he was thinking, his people to take care of and to guide along the road they should travel and he felt an absorbing affection for them, and also a deep irritation with them. By Yahweh, he resolved again as he had resolved under the walls of Pithom, in spite of themselves he would make them into a nation. Once again, as aforetime with the Kenites, he would drive this people to the mastery of the peninsula of Sinai and the country roundabout. Then, if Yahweh so commanded, when they were toughened, he would lead them against Canaan. Joshua would be a mighty help. Joshua would take on the task of moulding them into a disciplined fighting force. As for Aaron, he could well become the head of the priesthood.

Thus he thought, turning away from the plain. It was then that he remembered that there was one more decision for him to make. Close by was the tent in which Tharbis lay. She would be waiting for him. But at the back of the hillock was the tent of Zipporah, Zipporah who loved him, who was the mother of his children, who had, he recognized, suddenly and surprisingly, become necessary to him. Her respect was necessary—a thing he had never thought of with Tharbis. Yet Tharbis, he knew, would be offended. And Tharbis was an enchantment, a madness in his blood.

Would God there were no women in the world, he thought as he had thought twenty years ago. Women were the poisoners of the universe. Without them men could think clearly, feel clearly, see the will of God as in a crystal sea, with no disturbing wind to flutter the surface and destroy the vision. A man could not live with women or without them.

With steps that were slow and hesitating he walked towards the tent of Tharbis. When he reached the entrance he paused. Before his mind's eye was the night on which, on this same plain under Sinai, he had wedded Zipporah. He had done her an injustice then. He had thought that, in view of the custom of the Kenites, she had had experience of men and had taken her that way. Yet she had not complained. He could still hear her voice, feel her love. Tharbis was an enchantment. But Zipporah was reality. And Zipporah, at the last, he could not hurt as he knew she would be hurt if he did not go to her—after three years. Turning away, he strode to the tent at the back. As he entered Zipporah spoke:

"My husband," she breathed.

Within her tent Tharbis sat up angrily. She did not curse. It was too devastating an anger for that. Though she had realized the attractiveness of Zipporah and her interest had been awakened, seeing a worthy rival for Moses, yet she had been confident of victory. Now, however, she felt humiliated in the only way, had Moses known it, in which Tharbis could really be humiliated. For a man to be able to have her and to prefer another woman was to Tharbis the worst, the unforgivable insult. She was resolved, of course, for her pride's sake, to win Moses back. She also resolved to punish him in the way which was most natural to her. That Reuben—she had been putting him off, tantalizing him, suggesting that when he had achieved something to weaken the hold which Moses had on the Hebrews, then there might be a culmination to his desires. Now, however—and it might also complete her hold on Reuben.

Meanwhile Moses was knowing a great thankfulness for the choice he had made. He was not capable of appreciating fully the thoughts which Zipporah had had as she had lain there, waiting, or of how strong a self-control had been necessary to maintain her poise all afternoon and not to burst out into reproaches against her husband. She did not utter a single reproach now, having at this crisis a deep wisdom and a strength above reproaches, having discovered, that, in spite of the hurt she had suffered, she still loved Moses. She could have wept tears of joy to discover that, in spite of Tharbis, she was attractive to him. And Moses, in his turn, tried stumblingly in the darkness to express to her, as he had never done before, something of his own discovery that he did not want her to think badly of him, that he understood now as never before the value of that devotion which she had had for him through all the years. She listened. But, after a little, she turned her lips to his. Moses knew a sense of mastery. For he had Tharbis, with whom he was infatuated, and yet Zipporah, whom he loved, was still his, and Yahweh had put the Hebrews in the hollow of his hands. By Yahweh, he thought, even as he returned the kiss and felt her thighs soft against him, now I will lay down laws for the Hebrews. By Yahweh, now, at last, they shall be made completely His.

CHAPTER XII

FOR six days, and then a seventh, Moses had shut himself up in the Tent of Meeting, so that no one had seen him, not even Jethro. For he was fasting, so the rumour spread among the Hebrews, and searching for the will of Yahweh. In those seven days the elders of the Hebrews adjudged the complaints of the people, and those which they could not settle, Aaron and Hur decided. And during those seven days Jethro, as had been arranged, went back to Midian to rejoin the Kenites and lead them to Sinai. And Nun smiled to himself, seeing the people waiting in expectation, for Nun was confident that in the final issue the will of Yahweh and the will of Moses would turn out to be the same.

It was on the seventh day at even that Moses came out of the Tent. At his command the people were assembled. Moses stood before them. In those seven days he had communed with his own heart and that inner voice which he believed to be the Voice of Yahweh had spoken to him. Behind him were two braziers set and he stood on the lip of the hillock and towered before them as they gazed up at him, remembering at this instant, the miracle

of the Crossing and the miracle of the quails. . . . Abruptly his voice rolled out over them.

"Behold, I have called you unto me. For Yahweh hath spoken unto me!"

They waited.

"Behold Yahweh is prepared to reveal his bidding to his people, the Hebrews, the seed of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob. Through my lips shall He speak unto you. Therefore, make yourselves ready. Purify yourselves. Let no man come near his wife. For after three days I shall go up unto the Holy Mount. And there shall I AM reveal His bidding and give to me laws for His people, the Hebrews."

It was, however, on the evening of the third day that he made ready to go up to the Holy Mount. For as the afternoon waned he saw storm clouds gathering threateningly about the peak of Sinai. So, as evening came he had the people assembled and stood before them, waiting. It was sultry. The air seemed to press down upon the plain. Above Sinai the clouds were dark and ominous. So he waited. But then, as he had hoped, up on Sinai a vivid flash of lightning clove the storm cloud and the thunder crashed. Moses seized the moment. Striding to the edge of the knoll, he raised his hand.

"Behold, I AM calls me," he cried out to them. "Behold, it is the time. Wait ye here in the plain. And come not near the Holy Mount lest God slay you. And come not near your wives. For ye must be purified against my return. And the elders shall go with me to the foot of the Mount so that, when they have been touched by the skirts of the Presence, I may send them back to you. And Aaron and Hur shall rule over you until I come again. But make yourselves ready. For, when I return, I shall bear with me the words of the Very God."

He could feel that they believed. And all things had been made ready. Turning, without a glance at Tharbis or at Zipporah, or at his sons, he strode towards the Holy Mount. The elders followed him. Down in the plain the Hebrews watched them wonderingly, still and silent, save when here a man muttered to himself, or there a woman cried out hysterically; and save, too, when Nun, his head cocked to one side, observed the drama critically and found it good. And above their heads on Sinai the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled. It was, Nun thought to himself with the hint of a smile on his lips, a perfect setting. You could feel the weight of belief around you, and belief, he observed to himself, is self-hypnotizing. But, as the lightning flashed, he saw Reuben near him; and Reuben's hawk nose and keen eyes were turned, not towards those who were advancing,

as people believed, into the presence of God Himself, but on Tharbis, Tharbis standing on the edge of the hillock, one indolent hand on her hip, so that every flash of lightning outlined her shape, pure-drawn as in a picture. Nun's eyes narrowed. So that was what was towards. What part in the pattern were Tharbis and Reuben to play?

When he had reached the lower levels of Sinai, Moses sent the elders back. When he had gone a little farther, feeling Aaron's terror, he sent him back also. But Joshua went on up with him. For Joshua, the son of Nun, the sceptic, would have followed Moses into the bottomless pit itself, had Moses willed it, since he believed in Moses with a greater intensity than Moses himself believed in Yahweh. Then, when they had reached a level space halfway up the mountain Moses stopped and sat down with Joshua and talked with him and gave him the chisel and the mallet which he had brought and explained what he must do. They waited there the rest of the night. In the morning Moses left Joshua there and went on alone.

He sat once more on the very peak of Sinai. The level space was as empty as it had ever been. Within Moses himself, however, was a difference. When he had sat here last, his belief shattered by his defeat at the Wall of the Princess, he had looked down on the plain below and spat. Now he gazed downward and there were the tents of the Hebrews, whom he, with Yahweh's help, had led out of Egypt; and the miracle of the Crossing was in his mind and the strong belief that he was the instrument of Yahweh, His Chosen One. He looked beyond the tents. He saw the rugged sea of mountains and the ragged clouds floating over them and the sunlight rosy on them and, above, high in the sky, a solitary vulture hovered. It was still, very still, so that he realized how small people were against the immensity of space and how insignificant were their hopes and lusts and fears, yes—even his own—and yet how valiant. He did not think, as Nun would have thought, that this was a proof of the littleness of men in that, fearing immensity, they magnify their fears and lusts and hopes and dignify them by rules and taboos, so that their own egos may be made important.

Moses felt at peace, untroubled by scepticism, and he blanked his mind of thought, as a believer must do, and closed his eyes and waited. After a while he felt the Presence approach. He did not feel fear. He sat still. By and by the Presence seemed to speak to him. Moses did not argue. He listened. As he listened the day waned and night came and another day dawned and night came again. Moses scarcely noticed. To him this timeless rapture

was the culmination of all the long years, the weary years since first he had been flung forth from Egypt, and he felt himself so at one with the Power that there was now no dividing line between himself and It. Occasionally he jotted down a note on the papyrus he had brought with him. Occasionally, without really being conscious of it, he broke off a bit of bread from the loaf he had with him or took a sip of water from the jug beside him.

But for the most part, he sat still and let the Presence speak within him and was unconscious of the passing of time, sitting tranced, letting the Power possess him. At times his ideas were concerned with petty details of human conduct. At other times they attained a cosmic sweep. Yet in every case he was able to bring what the Presence seemed to say within him to bear on the one people with whom he was concerned, the Hebrews. Gradually, the words of the Presence seemed to sort themselves neatly in his mind, rules for the niceties and details of conduct, laws as between man and man and as concerning men and women, principles of a universal sweep which would be valid for all time, or, at least, for so long as the Hebrews were a nomad and a primitive people.

For Moses was not one of those who have trust in humanity and believe that if a few broad principles of conduct are laid down the individual may then be left free to choose for himself. All his experience had tended in the opposite direction, and, in addition, he felt that Yahweh ought to take an interest in the smallest details of the life of the Hebrews. In this way, he felt, for all time the Hebrews would have rules to live by and no man would be able to question whether something was a sin or not, since it would be laid down for him in the laws which came from Yahweh; nor was Moses philosophical enough to realize that in the course of the centuries conditions change and that what was valid for the Hebrews at this moment might be absurd a century hence. Still less did it enter into his reckoning that what was valid for the Hebrews of this present in which they lived, people just out of slavery and facing a wandering, primitive existence, might not be suitable for settled and civilized communities, if Yahweh should ever impose Himself upon them. Moses was a man, as always, of an amazing singleness of purpose. He saw his present problem, the Hebrews of this moment, crystal clear and did not look any farther. And this is the way to impose one's will.

It was a curious mixture which was in this way evolved in his consciousness. Laws of Egypt and Babylon sat cheek by jowl with primitive traditions of the Hebrews and equally primitive

taboos of the Kenites. Broad principles of conduct stood side by side with finicky rules on diet and an obsession with women as unclean and dangerous to men. From this point he advanced to the means to impose this code on the Hebrews. For he thought out—or, rather, as he believed—the Presence suggested to him that the tribe of Levi were, by tradition, the hereditary priests of the Hebrews. In the course of the centuries in Egypt this fact had almost been forgotten so that the Levites had been mingled with the other tribes and there had been little distinction between them and any other Hebrew. But now, remembering Egypt, Moses decided to make them a class apart to be the interpreters of Yahweh's will and the guardians of His Law. And he resolved that the Ark of the Kenites should be dignified and given a Tabernacle in which to dwell and shrouded around with magic and mystery. For he was assured that images were abhorrent to I AM; and Moses, who had studied under Ipuwer and had been influenced by Jethro, could not stomach the idea of Yahweh's being imprisoned by the hands of men into the form of an image. Such a process would make Him too familiar, would seem to set Him on a par in the minds of the Hebrews with the gods of Egypt whom they had seen and worshipped, and further there was the danger of the image being worshipped instead of the Power which it symbolized.

And yet he felt deeply, again remembering Ipuwer, that it was essential for his people to have some symbol of Yahweh which they could see and revere and think of as being inhabited by His Power but could not confuse with Yahweh Himself. Aaron could be—would be—the priest of that Ark and the High Priest of Yahweh. Not himself, but Aaron.

That in this wise he himself would still remain a figure apart, a greater than Aaron, the very mouthpiece of Yahweh, but not debarred by priestly duties from managing all the other details of the life of the Hebrews did not occur to Moses as a curious thought, any more than he reflected on the fact that with Aaron the High Priest of Yahweh, all power would be concentrated in the hands of himself or his immediate family. Moses took both conclusions for granted. He presumed that Yahweh took them for granted also.

At last, after day had succeeded night and night the day, time after unnoticed time, what he had seemed to hear was all absorbed in his consciousness and the Voice ceased to speak within him. He was not cognizant of this at first. At first he still sat quiet, waiting. But then he stirred and opened his eyes and began to realize the actual world about him, regarding it with a sense of bewilderment as of a man who has been rapt

from this earth into the very presence of divinity and has seen things unutterable and, returning, gazes about him as if set on a strange planet. Below him the plain was bright and peaceful in the sun of late afternoon. Across from him the mountains rolled away to Midian, and behind him, as he turned to look, over the shining sea, the mountains out of Africa shimmered in a shifting haze of violet and mauve.

He began to recollect who he was and why he was here. But there was still that curious feeling of unreality within him which lingers when one has passed through an experience beyond the power of words to express and then is abruptly returned to the ordinary things of life. Mechanically, he reached out for the loaf of bread. But it was gone and the jug of water was empty. He yawned, stretching himself. He started to rise and fell back, his limbs cramped and useless. After a little he managed to get clumsily to his feet. For some reason, unconnected with reason, his footsteps led him to the very edge of the level space. The height was dizzying below him. Down, far down, so diminished by distance that they seemed mere patches like moths settled, were the tents of the Hebrews. The thought occurred to him that if he were to fling himself down over this cliff the palm of Yahweh would be placed beneath him to bear him up as once in Egypt he had seen a magician make a man to float on air. Why not? Was he not the Chosen of Yahweh? How better could he appear to the Hebrews than floating on the invisible palm of God?

Fortunately, some remembered elements of reality restrained him for a moment; in that moment he recalled Joshua waiting for him, and the recollection awoke in him of his purpose in coming to the topmost peak of Sinai and of the way in which the purpose had been accomplished. Back into his mind burst like an exploding light all that which the Voice had seemed to say to him and, immediately, he was filled with a surging revival of energy, with an impatient desire to communicate the words of Yahweh to the Hebrews. Turning from the brink he began the descent.

Joshua was waiting. It had not even crossed his mind, as it might have done with another man, that some mischance might have overtaken Moses or that Yahweh might have slain him there on the mountain top. He was waiting and near him were the slabs of stone which Moses had bidden him get ready. Seeing them, Moses remembered what he had planned. For, before he had gone up to the mountain peak, as a leader who knows that people must be deceived to their own profit, he had decided that all the laws ought not to be communicated to the Hebrews at once and further that, to give greater sanctity to

these laws and to make the people realize that they were the words of the Very God, he must bring them something that they could see, something to which he could point and say:

"Behold! The finger of Yahweh, Himself!" And this, indeed, was why he had chosen Joshua as his sole companion. For Joshua would do without question whatever Moses commanded. So now he said to Joshua: "Write!"—and Joshua took up the mallet and the chisel.

The light was failing before they were done. They had to make the descent of the mountain in the darkness. So it was deep night when at last they came out from behind the shoulder of the mountain. Moses, walking in a daze, his mind full of what he would say to the Hebrews and how he would say it, blinked his eyes and looked and blinked and looked again. But Joshua, seeing the lights flashing on the hillock and in the plain beneath and hearing the mingled sounds that rolled across to them, started forward saying:

"There is a noise of war in the camp."

But Moses stopped him with his hand. They both listened.

"No," Moses said. "It is the noise of singing."

By common consent, with no more words, they hurried forward down the dip of the hill and through the ravine and along the path which would bring them right out upon the hillock. They came round the bend. The scene burst upon them. Joshua pursed his lips into a soundless whistle. But Moses, after one horrified glance, cried out and dashed down the two tablets of stone he had been carrying. For there before them, in front of the Tent of Meeting stood a golden bull, a bull like unto the Sacred Bull of Apis, which in his youth Moses had seen in Memphis. A fire played in front of it. Aaron stood before it, his hands high, pouring out a libation. Roundabout flashed a whirling, eddying dance of people, men and women, their heads tossing back, the women naked and dishevelled, their long hair shaken about them, the men leaping high, lascivious like he-goats when they see the flock. Down in the plain were other fires and other dances. And the noise of laughter and of singing and of cymbals and of sistra was as the noise of demons to Moses' ears, even as if it were the ancient festival of the Kenites which he had suppressed, or the yearly orgies to the Sacred Bull or the Goat of Mendes. For an instant he stood powerless of action, the sight swimming before his eyes. Then his vision cleared. And then, in the eddying circling dance he saw Tharbis, Tharbis dancing, shameless in her nakedness, her long black hair tossing about her, the firelight gleaming on her smooth flanks and moulded hips and on her

rounded voluptuous thighs and swaying pointed breasts, Tharbis dancing, Tharbis laughing, her head thrown back—and the man she held by the hand was Reuben!

Moses cried out with a great cry. Seizing Joshua's sword, he started forward. At his side Joshua caught at his arm. But Moses was beyond reason. He shook off Joshua's hand. He broke through the circle of revellers. With a single blow he dashed Aaron to the ground. With a single heave of his hands he toppled the golden bull from its pedestal so that it crashed to the ground. With a single passionate sweep of his arm he broke Tharbis away from Reuben and sent her reeling one way and Reuben staggering the other. And then, as the clashing of the cymbals and the shaking of the sistra stopped abruptly and the circle of dancers paused, gaping at him who had appeared out of nowhere, he stood gigantic before their affrighted eyes, his beard wild, his eyes blazing, his finger pointed at them like the incarnation of avenging Yahweh Himself.

"To your tents, ye who have sinned," he cried in a mighty voice. "To your tents, ere Yahweh slay you."

By the very suddenness of his appearance and the violence of the anger flowing out from him he compelled them. They cowered before him, starting to slink away. But Reuben recovered himself. With a fierce oath he leaped out before Moses. He called to the people.

"Why should we creep away?" he shouted strongly. "Why should we flee like whipped dogs. This Moses—who is he that he should rule over us? Did he not swear to lead us up unto Canaan? But this is not Canaan. Let us back to Egypt!"

He had cried out this far when Moses took one long stride towards him. The sword he had snatched from Joshua flashed so swiftly that it was like a streak of light. Reuben fell as if he had been a puppet held up by cords and the cords had been cut. A woman shrieked. A man cried out fearfully. Moses stood there—and in his eyes was death. Hurriedly, fearfully, they began to melt away. Moses turned to Joshua.

"Gather together your young men," he said, in a terrible voice. "Go among the tents. Slay and slay and make a lesson to these unregenerates, these stiff-necked. Put thou the mark of Yahweh upon them."

Joshua saluted and was gone. Moses turned and looked around him. But Tharbis had fled into the shadows. And then he was aware of Aaron getting up slowly, his hand to his face. But Moses did not feel pity. He turned on him.

"Why did you do this thing?" he demanded.

Aaron did not know what to say. He might have explained

that, while Moses had convinced himself of the personal and never-ceasing interest of Yahweh in the Hebrews, he himself had never been so convinced, since throughout his whole life he had followed the principle that, whether the gods existed or not, their intervention was too chancy and capricious, so that a man had to do the best he could with the practical things at hand; and that, in consequence, when Moses did not return and the people thought he was dead and clamoured about him, he had done what had seemed practical to save himself and his family. At the moment, however, he did not dare to try to explain to this fearsome, this almost supernatural brother of his. He stood silent. It was Nun who stepped out of the darkness where he had been watching as an interested observer and said:

"You were gone so long that the people thought that Yahweh had slain you. So they came about Aaron, clamouring. They said: 'Moses is gone. And we have no God to lead us. Make us gods, Aaron, to go before us.'"

"Why did you not refuse them?" Moses blazed out at Aaron. "Why did you not send them back to their tents? Did I not leave you and Hur to be their rulers?"

"I was afraid," Aaron muttered. "For Reuben led them and I was afraid that if I refused them, they would tear me limb from limb."

"But why—why the Sacred Bull of Apis—that abomination?"

Aaron looked on the ground. "I took their gold," he muttered uneasily. "From the women I took their gold. I poured it into the mould—and there came out this—this calf."

"Bull of Apis, I said!" Moses roared and then checked himself. For this was his brother and he had struck him. Nun observed:

"You should remember that but recently these men—and women—were slaves, Moses. And they are ignorant, uneducated. It was natural for them to demand a god whom they knew."

"They had Yahweh."

Nun shrugged his shoulders. "Yahweh is strange. And Yahweh is too far off, too majestic for them. You should put a greater touch of humanity into him, Moses."

Moses glared at him, reflecting with part of his mind that this man had always been a sceptic, that always there had been the hint of a mocking smile on his lips.

"And why the slaughter which you have ordered, Moses?" Nun went on, flinging out his hand in a gesture of revolt and stepping out of his role as an observer, not because he felt that it would be of much avail, but because as a civilized man he could not see cruelty without at least protesting against it. "Is the blood of the Hebrews, too, pleasing in the sight of Yahweh?"

If so, he must be a barbarian god. Or is it because you feel your leadership imperilled?"

All the tempestuous passion of the night and all the violence of the injury done to the mysticism in which he had been sunk on the mountain-top and all his anger against Tharbis, Tharbis who had humiliated him, the Chosen of Yahweh, in the sight of all the Hebrews, was in the blow that Moses struck. He was ashamed as soon as he had struck. He ran to pick up Nun and perceived that he had cracked the back of his head against a stone and was unconscious and breathing heavily. He turned to carry him to his tent. Over his shoulder he said to Aaron:

"Go and repent. Repent before the Lord God, the God of Sinai. For by the word of I AM Himself thou shalt yet live to impose His law upon the Hebrews."

CHAPTER XIII

IN the light of morning what has seemed necessary and logical the night before may put on a different guise.

Moses, indeed, did not regret either the killing of Reuben or the slaughter of some three thousand of the Hebrews by Joshua's young men, since to a man who as general of the Pharaoh had ordered holocausts of prisoners and had, as chieftain of the Kenites, adopted the ruthless policy of the weaker to the wall, the killing of three thousand was merely a mild and necessary measure to impress upon the Hebrews, once and for all, that he was their master and must be obeyed. But that he had struck his own brother troubled him and so did the fact that Nun, whom once he had saved from the stake of impalement and who was the father of Joshua, lay unconscious in his tent and no one could tell whether he would live or die, so that Moses felt ashamed and hoped that it would not lessen Joshua's devotion to him.

Yet this mood did not weaken the grimness with which he gazed on Tharbis, Tharbis who had sinned with Reuben, Tharbis who had humiliated him, the Chosen of Yahweh, before all the Hebrews, Tharbis who had, at last, resolved all Moses' doubts about her. It infuriated him to think of how she had perjured herself in the oaths which she had sworn. It drove him almost to frenzy to think of how, time after time, she had deceived him and he, like a fatuous fool, had listened to emotion and not to reason and had let her lie to him and lead him by the nose.

It was this last thought which, above all, seethed in fury in his brain. To think that she had had the temerity to lie

to *him*, Moses. To think that he had been fool enough to believe her.

It was this which was the ultimate insult. As he sat here in front of the Tent of Meeting, the sunlight of morning bright on the little knoll and on the tents upon it and, to his right, the rugged mass of Sinai etched in mauve and lilac against the blue bowl of the sky, and looked at her, standing before him between the guards, every line of her body, even at this moment, instinct with voluptuous promise, his whole being yearned to cry out to her: How many men have you had, you whore? How often did you deceive me—aye, even in Egypt when I was first wedded to you, how oft did you deceive me? You and your oaths. You and your lies—your damnable lies.

But he had to restrain himself. For Aaron was by and Joshua and Hur and Uzziel and Abiezer and Pagliel and all the chief elders of the Hebrews. So he said, speaking coldly:

"We have come to the end of the road, Tharbis."

She looked at him. If she could only get him by himself, she was thinking desperately. For the aura of danger, deadly danger, was around her and her instinct recognized it. Yet she could not think of words to say.

"At least," Moses went on, "it is the end of the road for you."

The sun was so bright. He could not mean what he seemed to mean. Yet her instinct told her that he did mean it. In a lithe movement, she broke from her guards and ran to clasp his knees.

"No," she cried wildly. "Spare me, Moses. Spare your wife."

He said one word: "Reuben."

"He did not touch me," she cried hysterically. "I swear it. By all the gods, by your own Yahweh, I swear it. May Yahweh strike me dead at this moment if I swear falsely. He did not touch me."

It was strange that even at this moment he wanted to believe her. Yes, even though his reason told him that she lied and had always lied and that truth and honour were not understandable to her, and even though he saw in the faces of those standing round, who had no emotion to bemuse their judgment, that they knew that she lied, he would still have preferred to believe her. For then he could have believed that once, at least, she had loved him as he had loved her and his pride would not have been completely in the dust.

But then the memory of all her deceit flooded back on him. He saw her turning on her heel. And he beheld her in the arms of Merneptah and of who know how many others, careless of him, forgetting him. And he saw her dancing with Reuben,

dancing in nakedness so that all could see, so that all could know the dishonour she had done to him, the Chosen of Yahweh—and as she danced, she laughed—she laughed!

"Take her away," he said, the words grating between his teeth. "Stone her with stones."

She cried out at that. She tried to scabble up him, entreating him with broken hysterical words, entreating him. He sat, not moving. They laid hands on her. She cried out again and clung to him, her hands wild, desperate, like claws clutching. They broke her clasp. They started to drag her away. She stretched out her hands to him as they dragged her away, struggling, turning her face around to cry out to him, a face that was like an animal's, not like a woman's. He was aware of the cruel unhuman faces of the elders as they turned to follow. He saw Hur pass his tongue over his lips, gloating. He knew that Joshua had, after a step or two, turned aside with a revolted gesture.

But he did not move. And then Zipporah was before him.

"Husband," she said falteringly. "Husband."

"What is it?" he asked harshly, not looking at her.

"Do not do this thing. Have mercy."

"Mercy? Mercy on that—thing!"

"She is a woman. Women are weak things, Moses."

He turned a grim-mouthed face towards her. "She was your rival. You argue against yourself."

"I know. But I would not wish my victory thus. I would sooner know defeat."

He looked after the elders. They were dragging Tharbis, he saw, towards a little level space a short distance off on the slope down from the hillock to the right. She was still struggling. But she was no longer crying out. She was moaning, an animal-like moan.

"I have given my command," he said. "I cannot draw back now."

"It is only a strong man who can admit a mistake, Moses. Think of Nun. You are sorry now. Will you not be sorry later if this woman, who has slept in your arms——?"

"Other wives have been stoned for adultery. For thus saith the Lord God, even Yahweh——"

"Yahweh! What has Yahweh to do with this? Yahweh is a God for men. He does not know women. Is this not your own affair, not Yahweh's? Is it not because she has sinned against you, not Yahweh, that you are thus relentless?"

He sat there stubbornly. Zipporah sank to her knees suddenly and said softly, compellingly:

"Look at me, Moses."

Unwillingly he looked. He saw the broad brow, the appealing eyes that were bright with tears gazing up at him. This woman he could trust. No, all women were not alike. Some you could trust—Jochebed—Zipporah. With some you could find comfort, and of this, surely, even Yahweh must approve. No, all women were not alike.

He looked away. He saw that, in spite of her struggles they had almost got Tharbis to the level place. Zipporah, who loved him, Zipporah, in whom he could trust and not find his trust deceived, asked this of him. Why trouble with a worthless woman?

He half started to rise. But then he sank back again. The things Tharbis had done to him, to *him*, the Chosen of Yahweh! Surely Yahweh Himself—his glance flashed to the Holy Mount—would decree punishment on this Tharbis. Had He not, indeed, already decreed punishment?

“Thou shalt not commit adultery.”

“Mercy,” Zipporah whispered at his knees. “Mercy . . .”

He got up abruptly. “Peace, woman,” he said sternly. After a glance at his face her hands fell back helplessly. She bowed her head. They had, Moses saw, at last got Tharbis to the level space. Like a man hypnotized, his face set and stern, he took a great stride towards that place and then another and yet another. Joshua turned to look at him.

Moses was not aware of it. His eyes were fixed on the scene before him. Unwillingly his feet took him towards it in slow, long, halting strides, one after another. He saw them fling Tharbis down. She came to her feet, screaming. Uzziel caught her and flung her down again. And then Hur stepped out—and even at this distance Moses could imagine the gloating on his face—and with a rough movement of his hand, tore her covering from her. Moses saw her shrink together, crouched on the ground in her nakedness, covering her face with her hands, and he was by now near enough to hear her shrieking out: “Don’t! Don’t!” And abruptly the years flashed back. And he was a boy again in the palace of Bint-Anath, and Nofiti, the Nubian girl, shrank in a heap before him, her breasts bare, covering her face with her hands as he struck at her with his throwing stick, his lips drawn back from his teeth—and Aunt Jochebed—no, *Mother* Jochebed—

And at this moment a stone flashed and thudded on Tharbis’ shoulder and she cried out and twisted away from the blow, half-raising herself so that all her nudity was seen and from that direction another stone struck her in the softness of her belly and below the full globes of her breasts, and a man laughed, as she shrank, together around the blow, a horrible laugh and

aimed a stone at the juncture of her thighs, and Moses lost his frozen immobility and came running down the slope, shouting out:

"Stop. I command you. Stop!"

They paused. They looked around at him, the stones ready in their hands, and their faces were not the faces of men but the faces of beasts.

"Let her go," Moses ordered.

They gaped at him. And then Hur snarled, an inarticulate snarl, and Uzziel grated out:

"You ordered it. You cannot stop us now."

"I take back my order. You shall not slay her."

"Not slay her!" Hur howled. "Not slay her!"

"No," Moses said. He looked at Tharbis. Her naked body was huddled together in a sobbing, moaning heap. But as he looked she began to realize that no more stones were striking her. She did not know why. She was incapable at this moment of really knowing anything—at least with her mind. But no stones were striking her. And her executioners were silent, their attention turned away from herself. She began to crawl away inch by inch as a wounded animal creeps, her face turned fearfully over her shoulder, her mouth gaping open, her breath coming in gasps. At Moses' side a man cursed and drew back his arm as if to throw. Moses struck him down. In three great steps he was out in the centre space between Tharbis and the elders. He turned to face them.

"No," he repeated. "You shall not slay her."

At the sound of his voice, close to her, Tharbis stopped crawling away. She looked up from the ground at him, her mouth still open, her eyes still not having intelligence in them.

"But why?" shouted Hur, his voice breaking. "Why so tender of her? Is it not the law of Yahweh, the law He hath given to the Hebrews? Why so tender with this one wanton—this whore?"

Moses thought fast. "She is not a Hebrew," he pointed out, speaking rapidly. "She is a Kushite woman. Therefore the laws of the Hebrews do not apply to her. Therefore we will cast her out. But we will not slay her."

"It is because she is your whore," Uzziel stated suddenly, his dark face dangerous, his lips drawn back from his teeth. Moses heard an answering snarl of assent from the others and they started to crowd forward and Pagliel picked up the stone he had dropped. "Your whore," Uzziel repeated, voicing, Moses realized, the feeling of all of them. "By Yahweh, it is not just. By Yahweh——"

"Be silent," Moses exclaimed, his face flushing.

"I will not be silent. By Yahweh——"

"By Yahweh, must I slay you? Am I the Chosen of Yahweh or not?"

They were silent. But they were not convinced. It was not so easy, Moses comprehended, to rouse the beast to fury and to calm it with a word. Ahiezer, too, picked up a rock, sneakily as if ashamed but yet driven to it, and they were all of them looking past him, looking not at him but at Tharbis. And they were all of them beginning to move forward, almost imperceptibly, but inevitably. Moses heard Tharbis sob suddenly, hysterically. His muscles tensed. His anger began to mount. And then, abruptly, Joshua was at his side, Joshua with his sword drawn in his hand. Moses relaxed. He saw the elders stop their inching forward. They began to look at each other furtively. First one and then another put down his rock quietly. First one and then another began to draw away like a thief sneaking out of a house he had thought empty but has found tenanted.

Moses turned. He looked at Tharbis. Already her instinct had told her the danger was past. Already she was getting herself together. The traces of her animal-like terror were still on her face and gasping sobs still shook her. But as Moses looked at her she drew herself into a crouching position. She looked up at him. She looked round at her retreating executioners. She looked again at Moses. And then in a little rush, careless of her bruises, she was across the space and was down on her knees, clasping him around the legs, sobbing and babbling out thanks at the same time, swearing that she would do anything, everything, and anything, for him, things he had not dreamed of, things . . .

Moses looked down at her. He realized with a sick disgust that she was a woman who, if you beat her, loved you—at least, for the moment. But it did not matter. Nothing about Tharbis mattered—not any more. He looked across at Joshua.

"There is once more a garrison of the Egyptians at the turquoise mines," he said. "Take guards. Fetch this woman. thither."

Her sobbing and her babbling stopped for a held second. Then they started again—but with a new note in them. Moses knew what that note meant. It meant that she felt desperately that she must continue to keep him in a softened mood. Her danger had been too close, too complete. But it also meant that underneath her acting she was thinking: The turquoise mines—men, Egyptian men—yes, now I will be able to buy my way back to Egypt—yes, back to Egypt.

But he did not seem to care. The last link of those chains which had bound him to her ever since, years before, he had seen her standing slim and proud among the women in the captured city of Napata, had fallen from off him. He had come far in those long years. Somewhere in the course of them he had changed from the smooth-browed, smooth-chinned, Prince of Egypt, the darling of fortune, to this grim-bearded man who stood here in the desolate waste under Sinai and was ready to herd a turbulent, fractious people along the road which it was his will and the will of Yahweh that they should travel. Tharbis had not changed. In essentials she was the same. But he was the Chosen of Yahweh. And, at last, he was free of Tharbis. For so Yahweh in His wisdom had ordained and so Yahweh in His own mysterious way had brought it to pass.

Free of Tharbis! Moses stood up grim but confident, his eyes on the mountain peak of Sinai.

A week had passed. Nun, his senses once more back in him, stood as one of the great throng gathered in the darkness under the hillock, waiting. He could sense the awe, the expectancy, the readiness to believe. Yes, he reflected, this part of that pattern which he had glimpsed years ago when Moses had been flung forth from Egypt was at last coming to completion. This people belonged to Moses now, to do with as he willed. Four short months ago they had dwelt in the green, the level fields of Goshen, and, so far as the main mass was concerned, had still worshipped the gods of Egypt and their own peculiar gods, which, in essence, however, were as the gods of Egypt. But now they stood here in this desolate plain under Sinai and did reverence to That which they believed to dwell on Sinai because Moses had told them so, and did not find it strange. And that, too was what Joshua, his son, believed.

The human heart, Nun thought, was in itself a mystery. He himself should feel estranged from Joshua, seeing that Joshua appeared to be so entirely different from himself, objective, practical, capable of such blind, unthinking belief that, even when Moses had struck down his father, his devotion to Moses had not faltered. Yet Nun did not find it so. He felt that he understood his son. He felt, also, that he understood Moses. This man had grown in stature, even in these past four months. When he had shepherded the Hebrews out of Goshen, he had been a leader. Now he was a dictator, as absolute as the Pharaoh himself. True, in every important command he referred the decision to Yahweh. But it could not escape Nun that the effect was the same. In the eyes of the Hebrews Yahweh might

bear the responsibility. Yet, in actuality, it was Moses who decided.

Not that Nun accused Moses of hypocrisy. To his wise perceptions it was evident that Moses by now believed in the existence of Yahweh and in the direction he thought Yahweh gave to him, as fervently as any primitive tribesman or ignorant peasant believed in the fetish he worshipped—though Nun was willing to admit that the beliefs were on different planes. For that matter, he told himself, smiling, his own belief in some great Design in the universe, of which Moses and the Hebrews were an enthralling part, could not be proved. To that extent he, Nun, was in the same class as Moses. That in which they believed was different—that was all.

And who was he to criticize Moses for his belief? He might, as a philosopher, regard it as interesting that Moses seemed to have so hypnotized himself that he actually believed that an actual, personal, all-powerful Yahweh dwelt on Sinai, whose main concern was to look after the Hebrews and after them alone—which was, surely, a limited and somewhat primitive view of deity, since if Yahweh were all-powerful, all nations and all races must seem the same to him. Yet who was he to criticize Moses? In this belief he had led the Hebrews out of Egypt. Inspired by it, he was now transforming this motley race of slaves into a unity, giving them one firm-fixed god, one definite code which was to be their own. Could he, Nun, have done as much? The answer was, 'No!' For reason and intelligence, Nun recognized at this moment, may make a man civilized. But they are swept away like bubbles before the fanaticism of an idea, whether true or false. And only such an idea could have had strength enough to capture the emotions of the Hebrews, as they had been captured now. So, give to Moses the honour. Coincidences—or, if one preferred the term, miracles—had worked for Moses. But it is part of a great leader to be lucky with coincidences—or so Nun thought. So give Moses the honour.

Thus he thought, watching the preparations on the knoll. And then Jethro, who had returned some days ago with his Kenites, came to the edge of the hillock, his beard floating in the wind, and he raised up his hands over the people and prayed to the God of Sinai and begged Him to make a covenant with the Hebrews. And next, feeling that this was a great moment, a historic moment, so that all the belief and enthusiasm of his youth had returned to him, Jethro faced about and went to the altar and sacrificed before them all, and the flames flared up, great ragged torches in the sky and Jethro turned around and cried out:

"Rejoice, O ye who are of the Seed of Abraham. For Yahweh hath received you and ye shall be His worshippers and do His bidding."

And then from the Tent of Meeting Moses came out and strode to the edge of the hillock and stood there, waiting. And behind him was the pillar of fire and the flames on the high altar, soaring up against the darkness. And he towered there, gigantic, two tablets of stone in his hands. And the people sighed, as it were a single sigh. And Moses looked down over them, not seeing individuals, but a sea of upturned faces, vague in the darkness, waiting for him. And a sense of power, such as he had never felt, even when before the Pharaoh, filled him. For ever since he had sent Tharbis away and had finally cut her out from his being, he had had no further doubts.

Zipporah? Yahweh knew of Zipporah and approved of her. For Moses had no doubts of Zipporah. And Zipporah did not interfere in the slightest with his singleness of purpose, with the great decision in his mind to take this people and make them worthy of the Yahweh in whom he believed. The way would be hard. The way would be long. But he would not falter. And Yahweh help the Hebrew who faltered! For he would not! No, by the whip of toil and the goad of the Law would he drive them along the path he had chosen for them—that Yahweh had chosen for them. He raised the tablets before them, the tablets which once again, returning to the Holy Mount, he had had Joshua write for him. In this moment he was no longer Moses. He was Yahweh. His voice pealed out:

"Hearken, O Hebrews. For thus saith the Lord God . . ."

CHAPTER XIV

HE paused part way up the mountain for lack of breath. It occurred to him that, throughout all his life, he had always been struggling up a mountainside, since when he had reached one peak, there had always appeared to be another in the distance, beckoning. But then he smiled, remembering that this peak of Moab at least would be the last he would scale. So he bent himself to the ascent and made his way up, little by little, troubled by the pain in his side. And the memory returned to him of the time when first he had climbed the Holy Mount of Sinai.

That time, however, was by now so far away that it seemed to belong to the life of some other person of whom he had heard, and not to himself. A man, he thought—as he had once thought

before the Wall of the Princes—is not one man throughout his life but two or three or half a score. For once he had been a careless boy, playing by the river near Memphis, and again he had become a Prince of Egypt and had had Tharbis to wife, and then had been a tortured, maddened fugitive and in turn a desert chieftain, and, next, after long striving, a vessel fit for the spirit of Yahweh. But now, all these guises stripped from him, he was only an old man on his way up a mountainside to die, as Nun, going apart, had died, so many years ago. And, he reflected, as he began the last ascent, this was the final service that he could do for the Hebrews, in that they should not see him die but, instead, that he should disappear mysteriously out of their ken so that the legend of himself which he had fostered in them these forty years and more should remain and grow until the reality of him was lost in mists and he became a gigantic figure past all human proportions, his weaknesses forgotten, the very symbol of Yahweh and His Law to the Hebrews. And so should the Law never be forgotten among the Hebrews or the miracles, magnified by time and wonder, whereby Yahweh had led them forth from Egypt. For, at the last, he recognized, though all else may leave, the instinct of leadership remains.

He had surmounted the last ascent. He sat himself down, a low shelf of rock, shoulder-high, at his back, and felt himself panting heavily. For a moment the pain in his side would not let him see or think. But when the mist cleared he saw below him on the plain the encampment of the Hebrews and across the rift of the Sea, which is called the Dead, the rounded hills of Canaan, fair as in a picture, laid out beneath him as if Yahweh wished to show him before he died, the land which was to be that of his people. Gazing at it, he thought of the long years, the years of wandering, the hours of triumph, the days of defeat. There had been the hour when he had smitten Amalek. And there had been the day and the night when the Midianites had been slaughtered at his command so that man, woman, and child in arms had been killed to the glory of Yahweh, save only those virgins who had not known man by lying with him. For Midian had been a stumbling block in the path of the Hebrews. And after that Edom had been crushed and Moab overwhelmed and tribe after tribe had been amalgamated with the Hebrews until now there was none to match them in the desert and they hung like a threatening cloud along the frontiers of Canaan.

True, he remembered, there had been one check. He leaned back against the rock wondering again why it had not seemed the moment to Yahweh. It was after the death of Merneptah, Merneptah who had ruled on for five years after the miracle of

the Crossing. The third Rameses had succeeded him. And in the reign of the third Rameses the storm from the north had broken. The ancient empire of the Kheta had been overthrown. And then a great host of the People of the Sea had fallen upon Egypt. Rameses had beaten them back. But another mingled host, advancing through Syria and Canaan with their oxen and their wagons and their women, as in the days of the Hyksos, had fallen by land upon Egypt. Once again Rameses had smitten them back, and the remnant of them, who called themselves Philistines, had paused in their retreat to occupy the coastland of Canaan:

It was then that he himself, seeing the Egyptian power in Canaan utterly destroyed and the whole land in confusion, had seized the moment. Yet he had failed. The Hebrews had been driven back. They were not grim or hardened enough at that time, he reflected now. That was the reason. This time, however, he told himself, something of his old fierceness seizing him, they would not be beaten back. This time that host encamped on the plain beneath, a pitiless, barbaric host, would sweep over Canaan like a destroying wind. Joshua would lead them to victory, Joshua who was, by now, a better general than he himself had ever been.

The surge of emotion had brought on the pain again, that pain which, increasing these last few days, had told him that it was time to go. He let himself relax, gazing down at Canaan. Already the shadows of late afternoon were beginning to fill the valleys. It was, in a way, appropriate to his mood, and his mind, clear as it had ever been, turned to the thought of death. He had seen death, so often—not only the death of unregarded multitudes but the death of those near and dear to him—Jochabed and Miriam and Aaron and Zipporah—yes, Zipporah with whom, ever since the driving out of Tharbis, he had lived in an amity and close communion which had been richer far than the turbulence of passion. But Zipporah had died before him.

But what of Tharbis? He paused, trying to recollect her. It was so many years since he had thought of her. And then she was before his mind again, swaying languorously, that false illusion of melancholy too deep for words and of sensitivity too fragile for reality on her face. It surprised him that he could no longer seem to feel resentment towards her. She, too, would be dead now, or near death. Where was she—in Avaris or Memphis or in far away Thebes? And how had she fared when she had become old and when the one marketable commodity which she had was no longer of avail to her? He found it in his heart to pity her.

But he had been thinking about death. He passed his fingers through the beard that floated to his knees as he sat, even as Amram had used to pass his fingers through his beard. Death—who knew what came after it? For this was one point on which Yahweh had not declared Himself. Was it, as the Egyptians believed, the entrance to a new and better life? Or was it, as the Kenites held, the transition to some vague and shadowy existence where one thought and saw but had no strength, drifting over lonely hills and uplands like dreary wraiths of mist or people seen in dreams? Or could it be, as Ipuwer had suggested, simply annihilation?

Moses did not know. Nor did he seem to care. For when he is young, he told himself, a man does not think of death as applying to himself. But when he is old and the idea of death for himself and not for some other person begins to become familiar to him, it does not seem to matter. What really did matter, anyhow? What did all humanity matter? What did the Hebrews themselves, on whom he had spent his life, really matter, whether they lived or died, whether they conquered or were slaves? At the last, no matter what one thought or believed, no matter how one struggled, it came to this, a lonely old man sitting on a mountain-top, waiting to die.

He felt himself shivering as the pain stabbed at him. The sun still shone on the mountain-top. But down below the dusk had fallen and the shadows were creeping from hill to rounded hill—even as shortly they would creep over himself.

But it was the old Moses who flung off this mood of futility. He would not, he said violently to himself, believe as Nun had believed, that all man did or strove to do was futility. No, he had believed in Yahweh. He would still believe in Yahweh. Painfully, he twisted himself around to look towards Sinai. The peaks were rosy in the setting sun, though the shadows lay thick between him and them. But as he stared the sun set and the light faded from the faraway peaks and the mists seemed to gather over them, and the pain in his side was as a knife. And, lo, as he gazed, the mists seemed to gather in a cloud and out of that cloud a Face seemed to look, kinder than he had dreamed. And the Face said:

“Fear not, Moses. For thou hast made the Hebrews My people, and hast given them My Law and the imprint which thou hast left shall never perish. The storms of suffering may beat upon them. The winds of dispersion may scatter them. The iron harrows of persecution may tear at their flesh and the rough boots of the conqueror stamp upon them. But the Law that thou didst give them shall remain, more enduring than the pyramids,

more ageless than the mountains. For it is written in their hearts. Fear not. Thy work is done."

This was what the Face said. He turned back painfully. Canaan was vague below him. He could no longer see the tents of his people. But he remembered how, even though in secret the Hebrews worshipped other gods, their One Great God, their own peculiar God, who, they felt, separated them from all other peoples, was Yahweh. And he knew content. And then suddenly for no reason, he saw not Canaan but Memphis, and Bint-Anath, graceful and lovely, walked in her garden and the birds were singing and on the pool the blue lotus flowers lay, disclosing their hearts of gold, and the voice of Jochebed called to him.

"Aunt Jochebed," he said. And then remembering: "Mother." And the night had come.

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